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HOW CHAUCER'S *CANTERBURY TALES* WORKS

Helen Cooper, University College Oxford

[This is the text of a lecture given at the University of Calcutta on 24 February, 1995, under the auspices of the British Council.]

The *Canterbury Tales* is one of the best and most famous works of English literature: a work that established Chaucer as one of the greatest writers in England of all time. For breadth and richness, it can be beaten only by the plays of Shakespeare; it cannot be matched by Dickens, Joyce, or any American writer. It is clear evidence that literature does not 'improve' on any evolutionary model, and that the Middle Ages are not inaccessible or of interest only to specialist scholars.

The *Canterbury Tales* was written just about six hundred years ago - two hundred years before Shakespeare - and although the work is in some senses 'timeless' the date does matter. It matters in particular because it would have been impossible to write it earlier. Eight hundred years ago, it would have been clear to any dispassionate observer that the English language was on the way out. After the Norman Conquest of 1066, English had become a trilingual country. Latin was the language of learning, the Church, of administration and record. French was the language of the court, of culture, and of international trade; it was also the language of the law, and, in due course, of proceedings in Parliament. Most literature written in England between 1066 and the early fourteenth century, into Chaucer's own lifetime, was written in those languages; some of the most famous 'French' works of the Middle Ages, such as the *Tristan* of Thomas, were in fact written in England. The English language, by contrast, was downgraded from the dominant position it had held before the Conquest to become the language of the fields and the marketplace - the language spoken by a handful of common people on the very edge of the known world.

The wise observer's predictions as to the imminent demise of the English language were not, of course, fulfilled. It was in these centuries of obscurity that English first showed its remarkable ability to adapt, absorb, change and develop. It borrowed words from French, in particular, and from Latin; it gradually established or re-established itself in an increasing number of social and administrative areas. So by Chaucer's lifetime, in the late fourteenth century, it was no longer simply the poor third of the languages spoken in England. Parliament began to conduct its proceedings in English. Parliament began to conduct its proceedings in England at about the time that Chaucer himself was a Member. It was at this period, therefore, that a poem in English could for the first time draw on the lexical resources to express the fullest cultural experience, and yet could be written for an audience that was itself fully culturally

experienced : an audience that could include the court, but also scholars, civil servants and merchants, and that potentially extended to anyone who spoke English.

Chaucer himself understood several languages. He was fluent, possibly bilingual, in French; he had reasonably good Latin; and he also understood Italian, an unusual accomplishment for an Englishman of the fourteenth century. He made good use of this knowledge on the two visits he made to Italy in the 1370s, when he made the acquaintance of the works of the great Italian writers of the century, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. So although he chose to write in such a provincial language as English, he did so as a cosmopolitan poet, able to draw on the best models of European literature available to an author of his time.

Chaucer also discovered from the continent new ways of writing. He writes with an extraordinary stylistic self-confidence; and he learns too more than just models of how to write - he also finds in the stock of European literature models for the stories that make up the *Canterbury Tales*. It was very rare, before the eighteenth century, for any writers to invent their stories : Shakespeare scarcely invents a single plot for any of his plays. Instead, they would retell old ones - from the Bible, for instance, from the Classics (the story of Troy was a perennial favourite), or from the vast stock of European popular tales. Chaucer, with his wide cultural knowledge, had a particularly generous range of stories at his disposal.

The *Canterbury Tales*, as Chaucer's fullest work, illustrates all these elements particularly clearly. It has a remarkable capacity to look in two directions at once: to English vernacular contexts, and to the highest Latin and European traditions; in social class, reflecting both Chaucer's own bourgeois origins as the son of a London merchant and his later career as a servant of the royal court; and in time, as it defers on one side to the God-centred outlook of the Middle Ages, with its stress on the next world, and on the other to the humanist outlook of the Renaissance, with its emphasis on this world.

The form taken by the *Canterbury Tales*, of a story-collection, allows all these disparate elements to come together. The story-collection as a form had originated in the East, in Arabic and in India (the *Pancha Tantra* was indeed known in the Latin West, in a Latin reworking of an Arabic version, though there is no evidence that Chaucer himself had come across it). Story-collections were especially popular all over Europe in the fourteenth century, but Chaucer's is unusual in two ways. First, on account of the variety of stories it contains: other collections most commonly gathered together examples of a single genre, such as moral tales or beast fables or saints' legends. Second, because of the variety of tellers: each tale is told by a different person, and together those tellers make up an entire cross-section of fourteenth-century society.

The work opens with the General Prologue - one of finest pictures we have of the kind of people who made up fourteenth-century England. It introduces some thirty people, Chaucer among them, who are embarking on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas a Becket at Canterbury, and who meet up by chance at an inn outside London - the Tabard Inn in Southwark, just south of the river. At the suggestion of the Host, the landlord of the inn, they agree to travel together and to tell stories to amuse themselves on the road. The stories, moreover, are to be told as a competition, with the teller of the best one to the Tabard. (Note, incidentally, the Host's commercial shrewdness: he is ensuring that his thirty guests will all return for a further night's stay, and since the losers will pay for the winner's supper he himself will not have to foot the bill for a single meal.)

The pilgrims are drawn from all the areas of life that it would be plausible to find on such a pilgrimage. Each one represents a different estate, in the medieval sense - a term equivalent to rank or profession, one's social place and function. The basic model of the community was represented in the Middle Ages in terms of a division of society into its various estates. The simplest of these models made a threefold division, into those who fight, who pray, and those who labour - an analysis that by Chaucer's time was becoming seriously outdated, as it makes no allowance for the increasingly important middle classes who figure so largely in the General Prologue and in the country at large. Chaucer none the less follows this basic tripartite model, presenting three ideal pilgrims to match the three basic estates. His Knight fights for God in the Crusades, the highest form of martial activity recognized. Prayer is represented by the good Parson, the parish priest who teaches by example as well as by word. Labour is exemplified in his brother the Ploughman, who labours for the love of God and his neighbour. Chaucer also, interestingly, portrays a fourth ideal pilgrim: the Clerk, or student, of whom he notes, 'Gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche' (l.308). The intellectual life of teaching and learning, by implication, qualifies in Chaucer's eyes as a basic fourth estate - a cheering thought for those of us in the academic world.

Mostly, however, people are not ideal, as Chaucer well knew. The remaining 26 or so pilgrims are not nearly so perfect. He did not, however, look out to the world around him for his models: he found them most immediately in another literary genre, that of estates satire - the form described most fully by Jill Mann (*Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The literature of social classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, (Cambridge, 1973)). This is a genre that describes the estates, the people who make up society, not for what they should be and do, but for what they fail to be and do; and most of the pilgrims do indeed fail to fulfil their given estate in just such ways. The Monk, for instance, like the monks of the satires, fails to keep his monastic vows of his monastery, so providing one of a number of bad exemplars of those who pray to set alongside the ideal Parson. Chaucer's lawyer and doctor set money above the achievement of justice or the healing of the patient. And there are some

outright scoundrels of the pilgrimage too, such as the dishonest Miller, a large man with a mouth as big as furnace who is given to breaking down doors with his head (why or under what circumstances, we are not told). Or there are characters such as the Prioress, who would be admirable as a lady of court but does not much resemble one's notion of an ideal prioress; or her companion the Second Nun, about whom we are told nothing at all.

In estates satires, women who were not members of religious orders were considered as an estate to themselves. Chaucer portrays only one such woman, the Wife of Bath. She has been married five times, and is on the lookout for a sixth husband; Chaucer gives her a profession of her own, as part of the cloth trade, but she is unquestionably above all a professional wife. As such she embodies everything men accused women, and wives in particular, of being. In the Prologue to her tale she shows a full familiarity with the literature of institutionalised antifeminism, and mounts a personal, intellectual and theological attack on it. She embraces with enthusiasm her role as representative of one half of humankind against the other.

The pilgrims, then, comprise a very varied group. In class, they range from the Knight to the Plowman; in virtue, from the ideal to the more or less villainous. Together they form an explicit model of a whole society, with all its virtues and all its failings.

The stories that Chaucer has them tell are similarly varied, and similarly complete in range - and a very wide range of kinds of story was available to Chaucer. Now, any book that we read for pleasure would probably be either a novel or a biography. In the fourteenth century, readers and audiences had a much wider variety of literary entertainment and edification at their disposal, a variety that offered a whole array of different readings of the world. There were romances, for instance, which present human love as the highest good, and bring their protagonists to a happy ending within this world. There were saints' lives, which insist that human love is worthless and that divine love is all that matters, and in which the central character comes to a very sticky ending - martyrdom - in this world, but is assured of eternal bliss in heaven. There were fabliaux, what Chaucer calls churls' tales: funny stories, usually improper, which concentrate on sex rather than love, go for immediate gratification, and generally show humans behaving like animals, or at least following their animal instincts. There were beast fables, a form with a venerable history going back to ancient India and Greece, which show animals behaving like humans, and draw morals to show their parallels with humans; often, though, those morals will be more pragmatic than ideal, showing how life is rather than how it ought to be. The world of the beast fable is one in which innocent lambs are eaten by cunning foxes, not as the hagiographic equivalent of the same story would show, where God intervenes to protect the innocent lamb. And there are other kinds of writing too that Chaucer includes: sermons, moral treatises, legends, exemplary stories

of all kinds.

Having assembled his array of potential narrators, Chaucer's next step is to match the kind of story to be told with the kind of person available to tell it. This follows less the much-vaunted principle of psychological realism, the tale as the expression of its teller's character, than it follows the rhetorical principle of decorum, appropriateness, what is fitting [see table]. So the Knight is given the highest of all the romances in the collection, where romance comes closest to epic; the Miller is assigned a churl's tale, which turns out to be a parody of the Knight's. The two religious women similarly tell stories appropriate to their station, a Miracle of the Blessed Virgin from the Prioress and the life of a female saint, St Cecilia, from the Second Nun. The good Parson delivers a penitential treatise on the right way to heaven through the analysis of sin.

Chaucer also gives a number of interesting misfits between teller and tale, especially for the scoundrels within the Church. The worldly Monk tells a thoroughly worldly tale, of the falls of great men from Fortune's wheel. Chaucer gives himself one really awful story, of a knight, a giant, and an elf-queen who never quite manages to make it onto the stage (a story that is indeed awful to the point of genius, like Shakespeare's mini-play of *Pyramus and Thisbe*: both are virtuoso pieces). He follows this up with a long prose piece on the nature of prudent government, which is in fact a straight translation of a Latin work. Both items are thoroughly inappropriate for a great poet to tell. They help, however, to create the illusion that the other pilgrims are indeed composing their own tales; and they also very effectively write Chaucer himself out of the competition.

The kinds of story Chaucer has available, then, are matched, or mismatched, with the kind of teller available. In addition, the cultural origin and the style of each tale is matched with the particular kind of story being told. I shall look at how this works in detail in a moment, in discussing four extracts from the work; let me now just indicate the general properties of each of the tales from which they come, and the contrasts between them. First, for romance, the Knight's Tale. This has an Italian original, drawn from the most up-to-date cosmopolitan culture. It is written in an elaborate vocabulary, with an abundance of French-derived words rich in courtly associations, and a good number drawn from philosophical discourse in Latin. The imagery that appears in the tale is of a noble kind: the flowers are ones familiar from courtly literature and courtly gardens, such as lilies or roses; the animals are exotic and fierce, such as lions and tigers; angels too are a possibility, again not drawn from everyday experience. All these are matched to an exotic setting, in ancient Athens; and the tale concerns itself not just with telling a story but with high ideals and difficult philosophical problems.

The churl's tale told by the Miller is the opposite of this in every respect. The story itself seems to have been one in popular circulation; at least, we know

of no written original that Chaucer could have been using. The vocabulary is of the simple old English or Germanic type, and is very much a language of things. The imagery is familiar and domestic - pear-trees; the animals are cats, ducks, calves-farmyard or household creatures. The setting is contemporary, in detailed recreation of present-day fourteenth-century Oxford.

The saint's life told by the Second Nun is different again. The original of this is in Latin, the language of the Church. Chaucer's own handling of the language in which he writes the tale invites you to read it metaphorically or symbolically, to look through images drawn from the real world to perceive a spiritual meaning beyond them. It has a distant setting, in the early Church, when miracles were a part of the ordinary workings of life.

The last of the extracts is from an animal fable. For these, the tradition specified simplicity : beast fables in Latin often served as easy reading for youngsters just starting the study of grammar. They were also often used in sermons as exemplary moral stories, so serving the purpose of moral teaching alongside their pedagogic function for learning, and aligning them with Chaucer's fourth estate' just as the tales of the Knight, Second Nun and Miller align with the social model of fighting, praying and labouring. Chaucer's beast fable, the Nun's Priest's Tale, is however more complex than this suggests. It has multiple originals, in languages that carry very different cultural associations : in Latin, in pupils' textbooks or preachers' manuals; in English, in forms as diverse as sermons and folksongs (we have some surviving about the fox and the goose); in French, in narrative forms such as the beast epic. All the other tales have appropriate tellers; but the Nun's Priest has barely been mentioned in the General Prologue, and there is no estates model of a nun's priest, the General Prologue, and there is no ministering to a convent, to create any particular set of expectations (in marked contrast to the Parson, the parish priest, who figures prominently in the estates satires). The teller of this story, then, is enigmatic, just as its sources are multiple and contradictory. In style, it includes everything - bits of all styles; it has a farmyard setting, but you are just as likely to find yourself in the middle of Roman history or Latin epic, though even its epic pretensions are mock-heroic. Best fables always convey morals; but here it is the telling that matters, not the moral.

There is one other, very important, thing to watch for in the extracts, and this has to do with how Chaucer creates coherence out of variety - differences that seem to invite the whole work to fly apart, to become a mere ragbag of assorted bits and pieces. He avoids this by making connections and drawing parallels between the different tales, so that they achieve their full potential for meaning only within the larger structure of the whole work. Sometimes he will use the same ideas or images in different contexts; or he will generate debates on particular topics across a whole range of tales, such as whether the universe is governed by Providence or chance, or whether women are a Good Thing, or what makes for a happy marriage, or whether priority should be given to this world

or the next. Sometimes he will write a tale that has the potential to act as a specific parody, such as that of the Knight by the Miller. He provides as many ways of looking at the world as there are stories; but he often looks at the same things in the world, from different angles.

In this first extract, from the Knight's Tale, the cousins Palamon and Arcite have been captured in battle, and they are just about to fall in love with the first woman they have seen in seven years, Emily. This is how Emily first appears to them and to us, in a splendid rhetorical set piece. (I [A] 1033-61)

This passeth yeer by yeer and day by day,
 Till it fil ones, in a morwe of May,
 That Emelye, that fairer was to sene 1035
 Than is the lylic upon his stalke grene,
 And fressher than the May with floures newe —
 For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
 I noot which was the fyner of hem two—
 Er it were day, as was hir wone to do,
 She was arisen and al redy dight,
 For may wole have no slogardie anyght.
 The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,
 And maketh it out of his slep to sterte,
 And maketh it out of his slep to sterte,
 And seith "Arys, and do thyn observaunce."
 This maked Emelye have remembraunce 1046
 To doon honour to May, and for to ryse.
 Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse:
 Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
 Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse. 1050
 And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste,
 She walketh up and down, and as hire liste
 She gadereth floures, party white and rede,
 To make a subtil gerland for hire hede;
 And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong. 1055
 The grete tour, that was so thikke and stroong,
 Which of the castel was the chief dongeoun
 (The as the knyghtes weten in prisoun
 Of which I tolde yow and tellen shal),
 Was evene jounant to the gardyn wal 1060
 Ther as this Emelye hadde hir pleyynge.

1034 *fil ines*: once happened

1035 *to sene*: to be seen, to look upon

1038 *stroof hire hewe*: her hue strove (vied with)

1039 *noot* = *ne uoot*, do not know

1040 *wone*: custom, wont

- 1041 dight: prepared
 1042 slogardie: sluggishness, laziness anyght: at night
 1043 season: season priketh: spurs, incites
 1044 sterle: move suddenly, awake
 1049 broyded: braided
 1050 yerde: yard
 1051 sonne upriste: rising of the sun
 1052 hire liste: it pleased her, she liked
 1054 subtil getland: ingenious, skilfully made, wreath
 1055 hevenyashly: in a heavenly manner
 1057 dongeon: keep, main fortification of a castle
 1060 even joynant: just next to
 1061 pleyynge: amusement

The vocabulary here has a marked French element, with all its accompanying courtly associations - well-assimilated words such as *rose*, *season*, *dungeon* and *prison*, alongside more recent imports such as *observaunce* (of which this is the earliest recorded usage) and *remembraunce*. The description of Emily is done in terms of the highest senses, sight and hearing - the most spiritual in the medieval hierarchy of the senses. We learn what she looks like, and how she sings - and she sings like an angel, which is a spiritual idea in itself. We could not, however, draw her: Chaucer is much less concerned with the specifics of what she looks like (the yellow hair is almost the only detail of that kind), than with the impression she makes. And he creates that by association: by the fact that she is mentioned, for the first fifteen lines or so of the passage, alternately with May, the season of love, until the woman and the month become almost interchangeable; that she is compared to roses and lilies, courtly flowers that carry further associations of love and purity, and she is gathering flowers similarly white and red; by the comparison with an angel. And she is made all the more desirable, and the love all the more distanced from any form of physical fulfilment, by her inaccessibility: she may be 'pleyyng' in the garden of French poetry of erotic desire, but the young knights are shut away from her in the 'thikke and strong' tower.

The heroine of the Miller's Tale, by contrast, is very accessible indeed: immediately after this next extract, the student Nicholas waylays her while her husband is out at work by grabbing her round the haunches. Alison is a young wife married to an old husband; she, like Emily, is pursued by two men, the student lodger and the parish clerk, but whichever one of them wins her, the result is going to be adulterous. Like the courtly heroine Emily, however, she is given a full rhetorical description. (I | A] 3233-70)

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therewithal
 As any wezle hir body gent and smal.
 A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk, 3235
 A barmclooth as whit as morne milk
 Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore.
 Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifore

And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
 Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
 The tapes of hir white voluper 3241
 Were of the same suyte of hir coler;
 Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.
 And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye;
 Ful smale ypullwed were hire browes two, 3245
 And tho were bent and blake as any sloo.
 She was ful moore blisful on to see
 Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,
 And softer than the wolfe is of a wether.
 And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether, 3250
 Tasseled with silk and perled with latoun.
 In al this world, to seken up and down,
 There nys no man so wys that koude thenche
 So gay a popelote or swich a wenche. 3254
 Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe
 Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.
 But of hir song, if was as loude and yerne
 As any swalwe sittynge on a berne.
 Therto she koude skippe and make game,
 As any kyde or calf folwynge his dame. 3260
 Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
 Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.
 Wynsynge she was, as is a joly colt,
 Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
 A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler, 3265
 As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.
 Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye.
 She was a prymerole, a piggesnyc,
 For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
 Or yet for any good yeman ot wedde. 3270

- 3234 wezele: weasel gent:maul:slender
 3235 ceynt: belt barred: with decorative strips
 3236 harmeclooth: apron mornie: morning
 3237 leuder: loins goore: flounce
 3238 smoke: shift, undergarment (over which aproas and more
 elaborate items of clothing are worn) broyden: embroidered.
 3239 coler: collar
 3241 tapes: ribbons voluper: cap
 3242 same suyte of : same color as
 3243 filet: headband
 3244 sikerly: truly likerous: flirtatious
 3245 ypullwed: plucked
 3246 slouc: sloe (a plum-like fruit)
 3247 blisful: pleasing

- 3248 *porre-jouette*: early-ripe pear
- 3249 *wolle*: wool wether:sheep (ram)
- 3250 *girdel*: belt
- 3251 *perled*: adorned *latoun*: brass-like alloy
- 3253 *thouche*: imagine
- 3254 *popelote*: little doll *wenche*: lower-class woman
- 3256 *Tour*: Tower of London (the mint) *noble*: a gold coin
(6 shillings, 8 pence)
- 3257 *yerne*: eager, lively
- 3258 *swalwe*: swallow *berne*: barn
- 3260 *dame*: mother (dam)
- 3261 *bragot*: country drink *meeth*: mead
- 3263 *Wynsynge*: skittish joly: spirited
- 3264 *upright*: straight bolt: cross-bow bolt
- 3266 *boos* of a bokeler: raise center of a shield
- 3268 *prymerole*, *piggensye*: primrose, "pig's eye," names of flowers
- 3269 *leggen*: lay

Almost the only French words in this passage are to do with Alison's clothes : even in the fourteenth century, French was the language of fashion. You could, indeed, reconstruct her clothing very precisely from this account : Chaucer gives it the loving attention of a fashion journalist. He gives an exact description of her, but he makes a significant departure from the recommended rhetorical prescription for such a portrait, which should start at the head and work downwards. The portrait of Alison starts with her belt and her 'lendes', loins; works up to her face, but then returns to her girdle and its tasselled purse; and finishes, not just with her shoes, but working back up her legs along the line of the laces (3267). It is no wonder that bedding her comes to mind in advance of wedding her. Moral stricture is not only absent, but largely pre-empted by the association of her with young and frisky animals (3259-63). They are familiar animals, the kid, the calf, the colt - just as the pear-tree is a commonplace tree. There was, however, some medieval joke about a pear-tree (I have never discovered just what) that meant that it always raised a snigger : it is not as innocent an image for Alison as it might appear. She is described in terms of the lower, physical, senses, smell, taste and touch : her mouth is like alcoholic drinks, intoxicating - and how do you know if you do not taste it ? how do you know that it is as sweet as an apple unless you take a bite ? or that she is softer than sheep's wool, unless you poke her ? The words used for her confirm this immediacy : she is a 'wench', a word Chaucer never uses in a courtly romance context; or colloquial pet words, 'popelote', 'piggensye'.

The Second Nun's Tale excludes any element of sex from the start. Cecilia marries Valerian but refuses to sleep with him, telling him that her chastity is guarded by an angel, whom he, not being baptised, cannot see. He, not surprisingly, is sceptical, but agrees to receive baptism; and this is what happens next. (VIII [a] 218-67)

Valerian gooth boom and fynt Cecilie
Withinne his chambre with an angel stonde.
This angel hadde of roses and of lillie

Corones two, the which he bar in honde;
 And first to Cecile, as I understonde,
 He yaf that oon, and after gan he take
 That oother to Valerian, hir make. 224
 "With body clene and with unwemmed thought
 Kepeth ay wel thise corones," quod he;
 "Fro paradys to yow have I hem broght,
 Ne nevere mo shal they roten bee,
 Ne lese hir soote savour, trusteth me;
 Ne nevere wight shal seen hem with his ye, 230
 But he be chaast and hate vileynye.
 And with tht word Tiburce his brother coom.
 And whan tht he the savour undernoom,
 Which that the roses and the lilies caste,
 Withinne his herte he gan to wondre faste, 245
 And seyde, "I wondre, this tyme of the year,
 Whennes that soote savour cometh so
 Of rose and lilies that I smelle heer.
 For though I hade hem in myne handes two,
 Teh savour myghte in em no depper go. 250
 The sweete smel that in myn herte I fynde
 Halt chaunged me al in another kynde.
 Valerian seyde: "Two corones han we,
 Snow whit and rose reed, thai shynen cleere,
 Whiche that thyne eyen han no myght to
 see; 255
 And as thou smellest hem thurgh my preyere,
 So shaltow seen hem, leeve brother deere,
 If it so be thou wolt, withouten slouthe,
 Bileve aright and knowen verray trouthe."
 Tiburce answerde, "Seistow this to me 260
 In sothnesse, or in drem I herkne this?
 "In dremes," quod Valerian, "han we be
 Unto this tyme, brother myn, ywis.
 But now at erst in trouthe oure dwellyng is."
 243 undernoom : perceived
 261 sothnesse : truth

Here the world is turned inside out, the physical universe being only a dream, while the true 'things' are spiritual - the lilies and roses, which will not fade and corrupt like those that Emily gathers; the angel here has a literal existence in the narrative, not a figurative existence as in Emily's simile. Tiburce can exercise only his lower physical sense of smell before his baptism; afterwards, the eyes of his mind and spirit are opened, and he can see spiritual things. The selection of vocabulary emphasises moral words - *chaste, unwemmed,*

clene, bileve, trouthe, or their opposites, vileynye, slouthe. Pleasure, in this tale, lies not in sex or in any mor sublimated human love, but is deferred beyond death to Paradise.

The beast fable, as I indicated earlier, is harder to pin down. It may have some element of the moral tale about it; but that is certainly hard to identify in this opening passage, a set-piece rhetorical description of the Emily or Alison variety about the cock Chanticleer and his favourite wife. (VII. 2859-81 [B2. 4049-71])

His coomb was redder that the fyn coral,
 And batailled as it were a castel wal; 4050
 His byle was blak, and as th jeer it shoon;
 Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
 His nayles whitter than the lylve flour,
 And lyk the burned gold was his colour.
 This gentil cok hade in his governaunce 2865
 Sevene hennes for to doon al his plesaunce,
 Whiche were his sustres and his paramours,
 And wonder lyk to hym, as of colours;
 Of whiche the faireste hewed on hir throte
 Was cleped faire damoysele Pertelote. *4060
 Curtys she was, discreet, and debonaire,
 And compaignable, and bar hyrself so faire
 Syn thilke day that she was seven nyght oold
 That trewely she hath the herte in hoold
 Of Chauntecleer, loken in every lith; 2875
 He loved hire so that wel was hym therwith
 But swich a joye was it to here hem synge,
 Whan that the brighte sonne gan to sprynge,
 In sweete accord, "My lief is faren in londe!"
 For thilke tyme, as I have understonde, *4070
 Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge.

- 2860 batailled : notched with crenelations
 2861 byle : beak jeet : jet, a gemlike coal
 2862 asure : azure toon : toes
 2867 paramours : concubines
 2871 debonaire : gracious
 2872 compaignable : sociable
 2874 hoold : possession, keeping
 2875 loken in every lith : locked in every limb (i.e., completely)
 2879 My lief is faren in londe : "My love has departed to the country," a popular song; see n.
 2887 drecched : troubled

The first shock here is that so much high-style imagery should be devoted to a cock : jewels - jet, coral, gold; the language of chivalry, in the castle battlements; of heraldry, in words such as azure and the accompanying lilies,

the fleurs-de-lis. French courtly language clusters thickly around *damoysele* *Pertelote*, *curteys*, *discreet*, *debonair*, *compaignable*. As with Emily, her qualities are more important than her appearance; so it is all the more startling to be reminded of her hennishness, in the colour of her throat feathers (2869). Emily had sung like an angel, Alison like a swallow (not at all a nice noise), Cecilia, at the start of her story, sang to God in her heart, which was enough to make her the patron saint of music; these birds sing like people. They sing, in fact, a popular song, and with that the language modulates from courtly French to a much more homely English vernacular. Alliterative pairings of the kind derived from Anglo-Saxon begin to appear: *hert in hoold*, *loken in every lith*, *my lief is faren in londe*.

There is a parody of broader themes from the Tales too. The Wife of Bath is pursuing her sixth husband; Chantecleer overgoes her by having seven wives, simultaneously, who are moreover 'his susters and his paramours' - he has not even gone through a proper marriage ceremony, and they are well within the forbidden degrees of kinship. The point is driven home later when we are told that Chantecleer does not observe sexual correctness in his motives for copulation, which in his case is 'more for delyt than world to multiplie' (3345). The other extracts were in some ways quintessential of their genre; here much of the point lies in the impossibility of applying conventional beast-fable-type moral to humans. However anthropomorphic the cock and hen may appear, there is an unbridgeable gap between them and the human world. In the world of the Second Nun's Tale, chastity represents perfection; here, it is a conceptual impossibility - a chaste cock is a contradiction in terms.

Chaucer, as we know, never completed the Canterbury Tales; he never brings the pilgrims back to the Tabard for the prizewinning supper. Instead, he ends with the prose tract of the Parson's Tale on the deadly sins and their remedial virtues, apparently told as the group enters Canterbury. The last words of the work are not about the supper at the Tabard, but about the replenishing of the soul by the sight of God, when there shall be no more hunger nor thirst. So neither the Host nor Chaucer ever pronounces nay judgement on the competition, as to which is the best story. Chaucer has, however, found a way around the problem that writing a 'best' story will necessitate his writing all the others as worse: the variety allows him to tell the best of every kind - the best romance, the best churl's tale, the best saint's life and beast fable. Yet that in turn presents a further problem: which would have won?

We do not know the answer, and speculation runs counter to scholarship. Chaucer, however, invites us to make just such a speculation, and it is, I think, possible to suggest some answers. Within the story, I suspect there is only one possible solution. The Host is a social toady; Chaucer drops a strong hint that he fixes the initial draw so that the Knight starts the storytelling, and he is not likely to pick anyone else when he closes the competition down. Certainly Chaucer writes the Knight's Tale in a way that makes it a plausible, even a likely,

estate	fight pray	labour	learn/teach
ideal	Knight Parson	Plowman	Clerk
others	Second Nun	Miller	Nun's Priest
genre	romance	saint's life	fabliau beast fable
source	Italian	Latin	vernacular mixed
register	Fe/Lat; courtly	spritual/ symblic	Germanic; all things

"FILIACTIONS AND AFFILIATIONS : " READINGS OF A MYTH IN ANTIQUITY
Krishna Sen

In the course of advising the tardy Perses on "the true way of existence", Hesiod says in *The Works and Days* :

....(when) a man's shameless spirit tramples his sense of honour ... lightly the Gods wipe out that man and diminish his household

.... when one does evil to host or guest or goes up into the bed of his brother, to lie in secret love with his brother's wife, doing acts that are against nature; or who unfeelingly abuse fatherless children

.... with all these Zeus in person is angry, and in the end he makes them pay a bitter price for their unrighteous dealings.¹

Hesiod might almost have been summarising the main outlines of the myth of the House of Atreus. Bearing in mind that the Hesiodic taboos remained fairly constant till well into the fourth century at least,² it comes as no surprise that a myth containing so many monitory situations should have provided the "shame culture" (to use Dodds' terminology) of the heroic age with a wealth of moral example, and the more morally sophisticated "guilt culture"³ of the archaic age with the fourth-century mythographer Asklepiades of Troilos called "tragodumena" or "material for tragedy".⁴

The progressive deepening of the ethical and philosophical implications of the myth from the time of Homer to the time of Aeschylus was only made possible by its having, from the earliest stages of its development, a very wide frame of episodes and their equally large number of variants have been extensively catalogued in antiquity by Apollodorus, Pausanias and Hyginus, and in modern times by Carl Kerényi, H.J. Rose and Robert Graves.⁵ What is interesting is the way the successive variants extended the interpretative possibilities of the myth, so as to metamorphose a primitive tale of treachery and revenge into a vehicle for metaphysical and psychological enquiry.

The early oral or traditional versions of the story brought together a number of concepts and practices dating from the dawn of Greek civilization. The Tantalus story evokes a Hesiodic golden age when "...things were the same for gods as for mortals ...",⁶ and favoured humans like Tantalus mingled freely with the Olympian deities. In his first Olympian ode Pindar ascribes Tantalus' fall from grace specifically to the abuse of such privileges⁷ - an accusation with which Hesiod would have agreed. Tantalus not only betrayed the trust reposed in him by the Olympians by stealing nectar and ambrosia from heaven for unlawful consumption by his fellow mortals, but also sacrilegiously sought to secure immortality for his son Pelops by cooking him and serving him up to the

gods at a feast.⁸ Tantalus was grievously punished by Zeus and his progeny cursed for three generations, and this was surely as much for violating the heroic taboo against infringing the norms of hospitality as for flouting the moral taboo against impiety and pride.

While this part of the story relates to the Olympians and to man's obligations towards them, another portion featuring the pursuit of Orestes by the Erinyes refers to even more ancient chthonic cults and to a very different code of morality. The many accounts of the purification of Orestes point directly to arcane rituals of catharsis, from the thaumaturgical version recorded by Pausanias in which Orestes redeemed himself by biting off a finger,⁹ to the more common tradition that, like Alcmaeon, he was purged of blood-guilt by means of a blood-offering from a sacrificial animal.¹⁰ Another episode, that of the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis to appease the goddess Artemis, also appears to be of ritual rather than theological origin. George Thomson has given this event a purely socio-cultural explanation as "...the custom of human sacrifice at the beginning of a campaign ...",¹¹ but the similarity between this occurrence and the stories of Menoikeus, Macaria, Polyxena and many others not associated with "... the beginning of a campaign ..." suggests that it represents the earliest form of the pharmakos, in the shape of the propitiatory human sacrifice. (In what is possibly an inverted form of the Iphigenia-pharmakos, both Herodotus and Pausanias identify Iphigenia with an anthropoctonous form of Artemis, to whom human sacrifice was offered¹² - a variant used by Euripides in Iphigenia in Tauris.) Finally, we have Gilbert Murray's contention that the earliest stages of the migrations and the settlement of Greece - as for example that Agamemnon might well have been "... a historical King of Kings ... a chief of the ships of the Akhaiusha."¹³

The literary treatment of the myth begins with Hesiod and Homer, and already there are modifications of the story as recorded by Pausanias and Hyginus in the light of altered cultural perceptions. Commentators have noted the absence of key element of the received story in these renderings - especially the generational curse beginning from Tantalus, Atreus' cannibal feast, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia. The usual explanation is that these omissions represent Ionian expurgations of barbaric local customs and beliefs which had infiltrated the Ionian astral myths during the long period of the migrations.¹⁴ Both Apollodorus and Pausanias mention Hesiod's substitution in the Eoas of the human sacrifice by a completely new version (later used by Stesichorus and Euripides) on which Artemis saves Iphigenia by spiriting her away, leaving a phantom on the altar in her stead.¹⁵ In Homer, too, Iphigenia (called Iphianassa) is not sacrificed.¹⁶ Robbed of any possible motive of injured maternal love, Clytemnestra thus appears in the *Odyssey* as a scheming harlot, a foil to the virtuous Penelope - and her well-deserved death at the hands of her son barely deserves a mention.¹⁷ (As the scene on the shield of Hephaestus in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad* indicates, blood-guilt is not a major moral issue in

Homer,¹⁸) As regards the celebrated curse of the Atreidae, the scholium on the relevant passage in the second book of the *Iliad* does refer to a more restricted curse pronounced by Pelops on Thyestes,¹⁹ but the text as we have it does not mention any curse at all:²⁰ while the two references in the *Odyssey* (in Books XI and XXIV) to Zeus being a relentless foe to the House of Atreus²¹ appear to refer, not to divine wrath justly provoked by ungodly actions, but to the Homeric "φθονος θεον" or "divine jealousy." (Only the downfall of the usurper Aegisthus is attributed to M. D. "hubris", in the first book of the *Odyssey*.²²) The emphasis, in all references to the Atreidae in the *Odyssey*, is on Orestes' lawful recovery of his rights through the slaughter of the regicide and adulterer Aegisthus, and he is held up as an example of filial piety to Telemachus by both Nestor and Menelaos-Athene (who represents her father Zeus).²³ As A. W. H. Adkins has observed of the Homeric hero - "... in Homer the agathoi often indulge in homicide in defence of their *arete*."²⁴ Guilt, retribution, and pollution in the sense of moral stigma, play no part at all in the Homeric universe.

That further ethical dimension emerges in embryonic form in the extant portions of the Epic Cycle as recorded by Proclus. The existing fragments rephrase the Atreidan story in a rudimentary pattern of moral cause and effect. The most extended treatment is in the *Cypria*, in which for the first time we hear of Agamemnon's sacrilegious act of hunting down a stag in the sacred grove at Aulis, thus provoking the wrath of Artemis which, according to Calchas' prophecy, could be averted only by the sacrifice of Iphigenia: Artemis, however, snatched the innocent girl from the altar and transported her to the land of the Taurii, leaving a stag in her place. (Hesiod's similar version merely recorded a miraculous event - the later reading is an attempt to explain the incident in moral terms.) Yet, though the Cyclic fragments anticipate fifth-century concerns and provide many of the now-familiar details (Pylades, for instance, first appears in the *Nostoi*²⁵), they suggest no overall framework of beliefs or values within which to integrate the diverse incidents, nor do they probe the deeper implications of the new material.

For a more philosophical treatment of the story tradition points to the lost *Orestes* of Stesichorus. This sixth century work appears to have been familiar well into the fifth century, as is evinced by the quoting of its opening line in the *Peace* (l. 775) of Aristophanes. From what is known of the work it appears that, in keeping with his Spartan loyalties, Stesichorus placed the action in Lacedaemonia instead of the more usual Argos, and there is no evidence that Cassandra figured in his version. But the role of Clytemnestra was immeasurably enhanced, and it is apparently to his rendering that we owe that complex combination of imperious woman, aggrieved mother and vindictive wife that Aeschylus was to develop into a character capable of challenging the heroic male. Stesichorus has his Clytemnestra dispatch her husband with an axe instead of with a sword as in Homer, possibly to emphasize the unnaturalness and brutality of the act: after the murder, she dreamed that "... there seemed to come to her a snake with the

crest of his head dabbled in blood..." , which then metamorphosed itself into the vengeful shade of Agamemnon. (Aeschylus turns the dream to more profitable and ironic account by identifying the snake with Orestes in the *Choephoroe*.) Stesichorus' other major innovation was to make Apollo the protector of Orestes against the onslaught of his mother's Erinyes : in a surviving fragment his Orestes cries out - "Give me the curved bow, the gift of Loxias, with which Apollo bade me keep off the Goddesses, if they should frighten me with raving madness."²⁶ It is not known what use was made of this act of divine intervention which replaced earlier accounts of ritual or magical deliverance. But the main concerns in Aeschylus - the opposition of matriarchal and patriarchal claims, and the confrontation between the Chthonian and the Olympian order - are already in evidence.

By contrast, Pindar, whose fifth-century versions of the Atreidan myth in *Olympian I* (476 B. C.) and *Pythian XI* (474 B. C.) predated the production of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 458 B. C., is far less innovative. The first *Olympian*, with its curious apology for Demeter's involuntary cannibalism in accidentally partaking of a morsel of the baby Pelops, contains a homily on the perils of impiety as exemplified by Tantalus. In the eleventh *Pythian*, Pindar does speculate on whether it was love for Iphigenia or lust for Aegisthus which drove Clytemnestra astray, but does not go on to explore the psychological conflict in any detail; and when Orestes slays the usurper with the "tardy help", not of Apollo, but of Ares, the god of war, he is merely, as in Homer, the wronged hero reclaiming his patrimony.²⁷

It was Aeschylus who most profoundly explored the range of possibilities opened up especially by Stesichorus. His great contribution, however, was to go even further - the *Oresteia* is a fundamental restatement of the entire myth in the light of the great post-Homeric revaluation of the heroic ethos, as well as of the religious tenets from which that ethos derived its validity. The crucial ethical problem of the *Oresteia* - that of blood-guilt - was, in Homer, not a problem at all.²⁸ However, by the sixth century, we have Heracleitus comparing the custom of purging blood-guilt by blood-offerings to the foolish attempt to wash off mud with more mud.²⁹ A fragment from the Theognid corpus likewise insists on moral accountability (and opposes the concept of a generational curse) by calling on Zeus to ensure that an offender "... should straightway pay for the harm he has done ... that the children of an unjust father who are themselves just ... should not pay for the transgressions of their father."³⁰ Aeschylus was heir to this momentous development in the understanding of morality, justice and the providential dispensation of the universe. Whether or not he was indeed an apostle of the Zeus-monotheism celebrated in his *Heliades* fragment,³¹ there can be no doubt that, in the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus completely transformed the Homeric universe. What we get is a complete moral world of cause and effect - of choice, act and consequence; and this radical alteration is achieved by the simple strategy of identifying the phases of the generational curse with the cycle

of guilt and retribution. The way is now open for the maledictions to cease with the cessation of guilt. The final stage of atonement and absolution is, however, no mere personal or local matter. The greatly enhanced dimension of the Aeschylean action is attained through another bold manoeuvre. Hyginus had named Tyndareus (the father of Clytemnestra) as the accuser of Orestes, while the Parian chronicler had cited Erigone, the daughter of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.³² By making the Erinyes of Clytemnestra the accusers and Apollo the defender of Orestes, Aeschylus lifts the action above the merely human plane, and rephrases the Stesichorean ending in terms of an explicit confrontation between the ethics of vengeance and the ethics of justice. More daringly, he makes Athens the scene and Athenian democratic institutions the means of the propitiation of the Erinyes, and the restitution, not just of Orestes, but of the accursed *oikos* which he represents. The old is by this means implicated in the new, the individual in the community, and the mythic past in the historic present. The trial of Orestes provides the key to the framework of ideas that integrates these deverse levels of existence within a conceptual whole. Ann Lebeck has demonstrated the various ways in which Aeschylus employed the notion of *telos* (fulfilment, consummation or completion) in the trilogy.³³ Athene's casting vote, whereby divine power expresses itself through a human institution, is emblematic of the final fulfilment. For it heralds the establishment of a new divine teleology that heals the terrible schisms in the deeply divided universe of the *Oresteia*, and ultimately subserves under its wise and just sovereignty all spheres of experience and all time.

So colossal was Aeschylus' achievement that the *Oresteia* came to function as the point of departure for all later adaptations of the myth. Just as Aeschylus had questioned and redefined the Homeric universe through the Atreidan story, so Euripides and Sophocles, in their Orestes plays, respectively query and affirm the Aeschylean postulate of a providential universe in the light of their altered attitudes. The currently accepted chronology of the fifth-century Orestes plays as enunciated by Brian Vickers communicates the sense of an impassioned debate on the nature of man and his universe, and testifies to the vitality of the Atreidan myth in supporting so large a range of issues. Vickers writes :

... we can now accept the sequence *Choephoroi*: a critique of that play by Euripides in his *Electra* (c. 420-418 B.C.); a critique of Euripides' version and a defence of Aeschylus in Sophocles' *Electra* (c. 423 B.C.).

Taken together, this group of plays establishes what Vickers calls a "sociology of morals".³⁴

Euripides' *Electra* (which followed the *Oresteia*, according to Vickers) exposes the contingent nature of traditional socio-ethical norms. For both Aeschylus and Euripides, Homer's world has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. But whereas Aeschylus reconciles the real and the ideal in one

grand vision of cosmic harmony, Euripides sharply distinguishes the ideal and the actual, or myth and fact, in terms of the philosophical distinction between appearance and reality. Euripides' Orestes puts his finger on the moral ambiguity of a world of posturing gods and pretentious heroes by invoking this same distinction - "There's no clear sign to tell the quality of a man; Nature and place turn vice and virtue upside down ... By what sign then, shall one tell good from bad?"³⁵ The point is driven home by the ironic contrast between the noble peasant, the able and mature Aegisthus and the clearly contrite Clytemnestra (all Euripides' inventions) on the one hand, and the shrewish Electra and vicious Orestes on the other. In this play Argos is flourishing under Aegisthus' benign rule. Under the circumstances, the Apolline fiat is not only unwarranted - it is actually rejected as unwise by the Dioscuri³⁶ - but appears to serve no purpose other than to incite and abet the sadistic mythological hero, Orestes. Vengeance and matricide are culpable acts which cannot be extenuated on the plea of divine decree. Euripides' stance parallels Aristotle's contention in the *Ethics* that "... there are some things which a man cannot be compelled to do - which he would rather die than do ... such a deed is matricide ...".³⁷ The Aeschylean synthesis of *arete* and piety through the striking paradox of a divinely sanctioned act of vengeance is subverted by Euripides' ironic insistence on the moral inadequacy of both Aeschylean piety and Homeric honour.

Sophocles' *Electra* is a more subtle play which indirectly affirms the Aeschylean vision of a divinely ordered universe. But to see it merely as a "defence" of Aeschylus as Vickers does is to miss its unique point. Sophocles starts with the Euripidean premise that a man should fashion his own moral universe, irrespective of the will of the gods. In a significant omission, neither Apollo nor the Erinyes intervene in the action of Sophocles' play. Orestes and Electra are "hounds on the trail of evil-doers",³⁸ following their natural instincts for revenge. Shorn of the cosmic context, however, their deed, though entirely justified, remains local and personal. Though the Chorus approves in principle of "... this day's work well done ..." it nevertheless predicts the fatal consequences of the uncurbed practice of "*lex talionis*" - "The curse has its way. The dead speak from the earth ...".³⁹ Human volition, the play suggests, can figure as the sole reality only in a morally truncated universe, in which man is denied the possibility of redemption through divine intercession.

If the Orestes of Euripides is the last word in this debate, it also, as it were, throws the debate wide open. In this harrowing play all moral certitudes are inverted, and we are back to the deeply fissured world of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* before Athene heals all with her casting vote. The story is wholly an invention of Euripides'. Orestes and Electra - perverse and paranoid perpetrators of revenge on Aegisthus and Clytemnestra - are condemned to death for their unlawful act by the Argive assembly: in retaliation, and instigated by an equally warped Pylades, they kidnap and nearly murder Hermione and Helen, and seriously threaten Menelaus. In a blistering parody of Aeschylus' divine

deliverance, Apollo appears at the critical moment to bail Orestes out of the crisis generated by the fury of the citizens at his excesses. It is not only that Apollo is shown to condone what are patently invidious acts. The very improbability of Apollo's sudden appearance in this grimly realistic play underlines Euripides' sceptical attitude towards the offering of supernatural solutions as instant panaceas for complex moral dilemmas. The cause of Orestes' mental turmoil, and the source of his schizoid behaviour, is his inability to distinguish right from wrong. In a brilliant stroke, Orestes' madness induced by his mother's Furies is presented as an internal psychological state, but his personal dilemma nevertheless represents a more general ethical quandary.

In the absence of a framework of defining values, all actions became equal :

I know that I am a polluted man,
I killed my mother. But that is not the sole truth.
I avenged my father, and for that act, I am pure.⁴⁰

Perceptively, the Chorus sings - " 'Crime in a just cause' is an impious sophistry, An insanity breeding in evil hearts."⁴¹ William Arrowsmith has read the Orestes as an allegory of the moral chaos rampant in Greece in the last years of the Peloponnesian War,⁴² but this is surely not all that the play communicates. What it gives us is a universe of gods and men who have completely lost their moral bearings; and the use of the myth, apart from ironically referring back to all the old (and now discarded) cosmological structures from Hesiod to Aeschylus, paradoxically confers an apocalyptic dimension on this evil world, which has not even the noble peasant of Electra to redeem it.

Bruno Snell has discovered the Euripidean resolution to this moral impasse in a valueless world, not in the Orestes, but in the Iphigenia in Aulis. Surrounded by cowards, poltroons and schemers (as Euripides portrays the Homeric heroes) - unworthy people for whose success and "honour" she must die - Iphigenia neither struggles nor mourns, but willingly sacrifices herself to an ideal. Personal integrity supersedes piety as the touchstone of the worthy life; contemplation replaces action; and in Snell's view, tragedy gives way to philosophy.⁴³

The range and depth of these fifth - century dramatised versions of the Orestes myth - all of them concentrating on the morally complex final phase (that of Orestes' revenge and its consequences) - emerge with particular clarity when one compares them to later renderings of these events. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid only briefly mentions Iphigenia's magical deliverance through the mediation of Artemis, but draws no moral conclusions.⁴⁴ Seneca's more extended treatment in his *Agamemnon* exploits the inherent sensationalism of the story through a gratuitous wallowing in "treachery, slaughter, gore"; and the successive catastrophes befalling the Atreidae become, in Seneca's hands, merely an object-lesson on the fickleness of Fortune - "Fortune roll on the headlong fates of Kings ..."⁴⁵

This immense hiatus between the Greek and Latin presentations with respect to emotional impact and intellectual content stems from Ovid's and Seneca's emphasis on the bizarre or barbarous events of the myth in and for themselves, while the Greek dramatists used this myth, as they used all others, as vehicles for the embodiment and the exploration of crucial socio-ethical issues. Bruno Snell has perceptively analysed this process at work with reference to the Orestes story, as it was reinterpreted from Aeschylus to Euripides :

The striking generic figures of the Olympian Gods had provided excellent models for human self-cognition, but the momentous legends of the heroic past supplied an even richer and more varied storehouse from which to equip a fitting portrayal of human nature. These tales are an improvement upon the technique of the simile because they are more flexible in their interpretation, ever ready to adapt themselves to fresh intellectual standards. ... It was ... poetry, and finally Attic tragedy, which through its myths set man on the way to understanding himself. ... Just so the Greeks discovered the human intellect - by reading it into the myths. The fate of Orestes makes it possible for Aeschylus to perceive the meaning of an "action" in the proper sense of the term; at the same time he is the first to graft this particular element upon the ancient myth. As the echo which precipitates man's understanding of himself becomes more human, so does man himself; as his thought processes become more rational, the secularization of myth follows suit.⁴⁶

When a myth is used in this way as a mode of introspection and cognition, it, as it were, transcends its local habitation, and the question of faith in, or assent to, its original significations becomes largely irrelevant. The myth then exists, not as a structure of morals and beliefs, but as a structure of ideas.

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5. See Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. Sir J. G. Frazer (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1921), Vol. II, pp. 191-279; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. W. H. S. Jones (London: Wm. Heinemann Ltd., 1918), Vol. I, pp. 130-231 passim and pp. 419-420, and Vol. IV, p. 70. The references in Hyginus' *Fabula* are catalogued by Robert Graves (citation follows). For modern compilations see Kerényi, ed. cit., Book I, ch. 5 ("Tantalos"), Book III, ch. 6 ("Atreus and his Dynasty"); Book III, ch. 9 ("Iphigeneia and her Brother and Sister"); H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: Methuen, 1928, sixth edition 1958, reprinted 1960), chs. 8 and 9, pp. 230-258 passim; Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Vol. II (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, reprinted 1985), pp. 25-84 (including references in Hyginus' *Fabula*).
6. Hesiod, *The Works and Days*, ed. cit., 31.
7. See Pindar, *Olympian I*, trans. F. M. Cornford, in *Greek Religious Thought from Homer to the Age of Alexander* (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), p. 112.
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9. Pausanias, VIII, 34, i-iv, ed. cit., vol. IV, p. 70.
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11. George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, ed. cit., p. 231.
12. Herodotus, *History* (IV, 103), trans. A. D. Godley (London: Heinemann, 1966), vol. II. p. 305; Pausanias, I. 43.i, ed. cit., vol. I, pp. 229-231.
13. Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (4th ed, Oxford: O. U. P., 1034), p. 209
14. See Sir Maurice Bowra, *Homer and his Forerunners* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1955) p. 30; Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, ed. cit., pp. 144-145; G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1062), p. 282; M. I. Finely, *The World of Odysseus* (2nd ed; London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), p. 152.
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16. See Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. E. V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950, reprinted 1979), Book IX, p. 165.
17. See Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E. V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964, reprinted 1977), pp. 55, 182 and 356.
18. See Homer, *The Iliad*, ed. cit., 350.
19. See Kerényi, ed. cit., p. 303, n. 65.
20. See Homer, *The Iliad*, ed. cit., p. 42.
21. Homer, *The Odyssey*, ed. cit., pp. 183 and 351.
22. Ibid, p. 26.
23. Ibid, pp. 26 and 55.
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25. For the references in Cypria and Nostoi see F. R. B. Godolphin, ed., *Great Classical Myths* (New York: The Modern Library, 1964), pp. 382-383 and 386.

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31. Quoted in F. M. Cornford, *Greek Religious Thought*, ed. cit., p. 109
32. For both references see Apollodorus, *The Library*, ed. cit., pp. 271-72, translator's note 4.
33. See Ann Lebeck, *The Orestela : A Study in Language and Structure* (Cambridge, Mass : Harvard U. P., 1971), pp. 72-73.
34. Brian Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London : Longman, 1973), pp. 553 and 261.
35. Euripides, *Electra* in *Medea and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1963, reprinted 1975), pp. 117-118.
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37. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trns. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1955, reprinted 1971), p. 78
38. Sophocles, *Electra* in *Electra and Other Plays*, trans. E.F. Watling (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1953, reprinted 1973), p. 112.
39. Ibid, pp. 117 and 113.
40. Euripides, *Orestes* in *Orestes and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1972), p. 319.
41. Ibid, p. 330.
42. See William Arrowsmith, "A Greek Theatre of Ideas", in John Gassner ed., *Ideas in the Drama* (New York : Columbia U.P., 1964, reprinted 1965), pp. 25-27.
43. Bruno Snell, "From Tragedy to Philosophy : *Iphigenia in Aulis*" in Erich Segal ed., *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, (Oxford : O.U.P., 1983), pp. 396-405.
44. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1955), p. 269.
45. Seneca, *Agamemnon* in *Seneca's Tragedies*, Vol. II, trans. F.J. Miller (London : Heinemann, 1917), pp. 7 and 13
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COMMENTS ON TWO NON-FICTIONAL WORKS OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Sourin Guha

"... but I must write because if I do not write a certain amount I do not enjoy the rest of my life."

— Hemingway in *Green Hills of Africa*.

During the decade following the publication of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Hemingway wrote two works of non-fiction, one about bullfighting in Spain and other parts of the world (*Death in the Afternoon*), and the other about big-game hunting in Africa (*Green Hills of Africa*).

Death in the Afternoon (1932) still remains one of the very best that has been written in English about bullfighting. To say that one likes bullfighting and to spend time on that is to opt for decadent norms and mode of living. It is a step further in his isolation that Hemingway goes to Spain to provide a symbolic ritual for the age he lives in and has been writing about. The book is important in that it contains the author's general reflection on the nature of life and its end. Frequently he comes to speak of the end only, thus limiting his approach to a very special phase of human and animal life.

What Hemingway has been trying to learn from bullfight is grace, balance and mobility. He is good when he covers the fights and describes the fighters but is hopelessly inadequate when he dabbles in philosophy with the old lady. I am yet to appreciate the measure of one's finesse when one says that killing is an art. Surgery is an art because it cures or, at least, aims to cure and does not kill. But bullfighting kills, and kills in a horrid way, either the bull or the matador, besides the goring of horses and even occasionally that of the picadors and banderilleros. If the matador fails to kill the bull within the allotted fifteen minutes he is discredited in the eyes of the public and the bull is taken in the corral to be killed. Often the matador is fatally gored or even killed by the bull. It is a relic of medieval barbarism that is still found in Spain and some parts of South America. The bull is a quite harmless and useful animal and the manner in which he is tortured and put to death is called the bullfight. It has "destroyed" many promising young men of Spain, men of courage and grit, destroyed them with diseases that are common to bullfighters, with tuberculosis and syphilis, destroyed them with painful horn-wounds that have disabled them for the rest of their lives, and finally destroyed them with death in the bull-ring.

What attracts Hemingway about the bullfight is the desperation of the matador to face death, his skill and "art",² if it can be called an art, in tackling the bull and finally the way he kills the bull or is killed by the bull which marks the end of the ritual. It is not a sport, Hemingway admits, because the bull is not placed in equal position to succeed. The odds against the bull are heavy.

Nevertheless, there is danger for the man and a successful matador (by success I mean if he is not already killed or gored by the bull) faces death each evening in tackling the bull. It leads to a sense of desperation in him which prevents his alignment with saner elements in the society. Perhaps what I want to say has been best described by Maxwell Geismar when he call it an "absurd"³ book. The intention of *Death in the Afternoon* is obviously absurd- to find beauty in something which is morally indefensible. Yet its executing is superb. Its prose with long-drawn-out sentences following in almost perfect rhythm and cadence the action of the bullfighter and the movement of the bull, is admirable. There are linked-up clauses which give a sequence of motion and fact, that is how the matador does his work. It is not a dull book; it is highly interesting all through and the writer has taken pains to know and learn bullfighting so that he can write a first-hand book from his personal experience with the matadors, seeing them in action and out of the ring. There is hardly anything which does not arouse human interest. There is hardly anything which does not make one feel the sheer waste of human energy and skill. Geismar poings out the ephemeral interest in Hemingway's fascination for bullfight :

It is the conception of the matador, we may say, that has caught Hemingway's admiration: the dignity, courage, discipline, and honour... This dignity and courage, however, the sense of man's virtue, comes out infrequently and against large odds:... And the sense of man's virtue, rare, composed of such dubious components, lasts only for a moment.⁴

At the very opening chapter of the book, Hemingway says that he prefers violent death which, according to him, has none of the complications of "so-called natural death."⁵ It may be said in refutation of this that violent death can sometimes be as complicated as, and more painful than, natural death, and natural death is often without any complication. Death is a biological process which is bound to occur to every man and woman and also to every living creature on earth. To take an intelligent interest in death does not mean that one has to be interested in bullfighting. "To drag in notions of honour and glory here, and take them seriously," writes Max Eastman about Hemingway's interest in bullfight, "is ungrown-up enough and rather sophomoric."⁶

Green Hills of Africa II (1935) is a travelogue, an account of big-game hunting deep inside Africa. The author feels "happy"⁷ in the animal world and the book is a pure literary exercise. The author tells us that he has "attempted to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month's action can, if truly."⁸ It is told in an attractive, if sometimes flat prose and the hunter's reaction after each shooting incident is skilfully portrayed. And this is how a rhino looked, being dead :

There he was, long-hulked, heavy-sided, prehistoric looking, the hide like vulcanized rubber and faintly transparent looking, scarred with a badly healed horn wound that the birds had pecked at, his tail

thick, round, and pointed, flat many-legged ticks crawling on him, his ears fringed with hair, tiny pig eyes, moss growing on the base of his horn that grew out forward from his nose.⁹

This is fine prose, objectively representing the face of death with hardly any surplusage in the language. It is a vivid description of a huge, giant-sized animal lying dead. The epithet "prehistoric looking" adds to the grandeur of the animal. Above all, this is admirable writing hardly leaving anything to be desired to describe the death of a rhino.

But the book on the whole does not give an impression of sustained skill. There occurs the fallacy of observing and recording everything and anything around leading to the consequence that it is occasionally dull. It is of a very limited range of interests, and here is swaggering as when P.O.M. thinks of her husband (Hemingway) as the greatest writer in America.¹⁰

The natives, Africa groaning under colonization, the problems faced by the newly independent African countries- these are among cogent points to come up in any serious discussion or book on Africa, but Hemingway leaves them aside and though he assures Kandisky that he was interested in the natives and "other things"¹¹ besides kudu hunting, he shows little evidence in the book that he was so. He remains satisfied with "this silliness of kudu"¹² and declares it blatantly as such. Out of the woods and their dwellers, a self-sufficient world has been sought to be created. The long hunt, tiredness, coming back to the camp in the evening and relaxing in pyjamas- this has been usual pattern of a month's action. The adequacy of such a world may very well be, and has been, held in question. In *Death in the Afternoon*, there is a reference to Aldous Huxley who does not see eye to eye with Hemingway and takes him to task for his anti-intellectualism.¹³ Hemingway himself must have been thinking about it by this time. In *Green Hills of Africa* there is a long conversation with Kandisky about occupations which are serious and which are not, though one may not agree with the author's version of things.¹⁴ I have already outlined the difference between an intellectual reader's apprehension and our author's one and I need not dwell on it long except to point out that he does not explain to Kandisky what he means by "other things" besides kudu hunting¹⁵ and, according to Huxley, Hemingway often feigns "stupidity"¹⁶ whereas he should take an intelligent approach to these things; why he thus "feigns" is worth pondering.

By the time Hemingway wrote *Green Hills of Africa*, a persistent clamour arose that Hemingway had depicted an irresponsible society. It was believed by some thinkers that Hemingway's world is inhabited by persons who have no social obligations: at a time when the Great Depression had thoroughly racked America, Hemingway was enjoying biggame hunting deep inside the heart of Africa, quite unconcerned; and the preoccupations of his heroes are no better than those of the author. Baker has stated this is case clearly enough:

To certain members of the new Marxist clan, Hemingway began to look unfashionable in the early 1930's. *Death in the Afternoon* came out in the dead vast bottom of the Depression. And how could he have the temerity to publish a manual of the bullfight while Americans were selling apples on street-corners, fighting over restaurant garbage cans for food, or being laid off in wholesale lots ?¹⁷

It is however in his next two novels, *To Have and Have Not* (1937) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) that Hemingway tries to make his art social-minded. that How far he has succeeded in doing so is a moot point. But what is significant within the purview of our inquiry is that Hemingway's art in the two non-fictionat works deals with an apolitical recreational search for an authorial holiday between serious novels.

Notes

1. Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1974), p. 74.
2. Ibid., p. 67.
3. Maxwell Geismar, *Writers in Crisis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 54.
4. Ibid., p. 55.
5. *Death in the Afternoon*, p. 6.
6. Max Eastman, "Bull in the Afternoon," *Ernest Hemingway: The Man and His Work*, ed., John K.M. McCaffery (New York: Avon Book Division, 1950), p. 57.
7. Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1972), p. 28.
8. Penguin cover-page citation.
9. *Green Hills of Africa*, p. 54.
10. Ibid., p. 23.
11. Ibid., p. 28.
12. Ibid., p. 28.
13. *Death in the Afternoon*, pp. 180-181.
14. *Green Hills of Africa*, pp. 14-34.
15. Ibid., p. 28.
16. *Death in the Afternoon*, p. 181.
17. Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* (Princeton: Princeton university Press, fourth Edition, 1972), pp. 202-203.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PERSONA PROJECTION IN SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORY PLAYS

Sarbani Chaudhury

I

Tillyard's projection of Shakespeare's history plays as successful expressions of a *universally held* ... scheme of history ... fundamentally religious ... of which Elizabeth's England was the acknowledged outcome, formulated in 1944, still dominates the seemingly multifarious approach to these texts (Tillyard 1956:320-1) (Emphasis added).^{*} This is evidenced in as sensitive a critic as Norman Rabkin who allows for self-destructive contradictions within the mechanics of legitimacy yet states that 'Divinity' hedges 'royal power' and punishes its opposers and that "the Elizabethan sense ... [of] the well-ordered polity is both a reflection of cosmic order and the product of a benevolent providence." (Rabkin 1984:84,86).

Tillyardian assumptions err on two counts. First, a particular conception of providence is envisaged as supratemporal and ahistorical, and by inference, so is absolute monarchy, its "objective-conrelative" on the socio-political plane. Second, this construct of providence, proclaimed as the single legitimate one by the existing monarchy for its own ratification, is perceived as an external "given" endorsed by the whole community. Such a formulation denies the knowledge of varying and contradictory notions of providence current at the time. It becomes, in effect, an extension of the official absolutist propaganda.

More importantly, it fails to locate the basic tensions generated within the contemporary political frame-work by the contrary discourses on absolutist state and individual manumission. The coalising of religious and political leadership in the royal figure vested authority in a person rather than in institution, which was the medieval practice. Elizabeth becomes 'absolute in the realms of both pope and Emperor ... The duties imposed are the will of the Prince not the will of God.' (Danby 1961:51). The religious and 'social' usurpation effected by Tudor absolutism which underscored the monarch's rights as opposed to his responsibilities and devolved "duty" exclusively on the subject, however, failed to suppress the public debate on "mutual compact" that existed at least theoretically, in medieval times, between the ruler and the ruled.

Besides, Reformation's polemical exposition of private conscience as both the sole arbiter in moral and religious matters and as an object to be coerced within the confines of state authority, activated the dilemma of man's conflicting obligation to conscience and obedience. Shakespeare's history plays trace the

^{*}See Bibliography

basic tensions involved in the efforts of a barely adolescent monarchy to interrogate, familiarise and contain these diverse problems in order to legitimise its right to unconditional power. The populace's mixed and complex responses to the demands of subjection are countered by a persistent attempt to elicit from them a single, conditioned response of obedience.

Resistance against this attempt operates at two levels: in the disgruntled noblemen of the ruling community and the socially invisible men (Falstaff, Cade, etc.). The former, engaged in a selfseeking enterprise to dislocate the individual power-wielder without disturbing the legitimising infrastructure, challenge only the person, not the position. The latter refuse to endorse the validity of the system by positing an alternative ideology which questions the very necessity of enclosing absolute monarchy within the human experience.

Presenting a public persona of the king hedged by divine right and primogeniture, for mass consumption, was one major mode of containing the second attitude which was evidently more subversive because of its radical implications and the numerical force behind it. A deliberate but artificial fission of the royal figure occurred at this juncture. The official version of royalty was not factual but an ideologically conceived media projection for the political purpose of inducing subjection. This elaborate myth-making was not for public scrutiny. For them the "emblem" purported to be the "real"; the "partial" was the "whole". For the monarch however, the necessary precondition for effectively manipulating public opinion, was to demarcate clearly the projected icon from the private individual/self. Shakespeare's English kings endeavour to negotiate this dual identity. Their efficacy as rulers is directly proportional to their degree of success in obliterating from public view (and subsequently memory), the propelling impulse behind the "emblem". The more unambiguously they identify their naked self-aggrandisement, the more substantive becomes their "false-selves" meant for popular consumption. From *Richard II* to *Henry V* there is an increasing estrangement of the "public" from the "private" figure. In *Henry VIII* the distinction between the signifier and the signified is expunged from the text itself.

II

The enigma of Richard II - 'epitome of political ineptitude' yet 'Christ-like martyr' (Sanders 1968:173) - can be partially resolved by focusing on the paradoxical but twin aspects of his character: his faith in the sanctified authority of his status and the slightly theatrical but sincere introspection which expands to explore its legitimacy and divinity.

Richard's confidence in the self-perpetuating power of his divine ordination is, during the early stage of Bolingbroke's challenge, buttressed by his prior knowledge of military support from the Welshmen and York. But as

the odds mount, this is gradually transformed into a blind, desperate faith in providence. When God's deputy fails to protect himself, 'God omnipotent' shall muster 'clouds' and 'Armies of pestilence' for redress (*Richard II* III, iii, 85-7). This is the essential discourse legitimising the Tudor myth by representing the spurious as self-evident, metaphysically ordained reality, thereby forestalling any disruptive intervention. To uphold this myth Richard creates the barely sustained illusion of deposing himself: 'With mine own hands I give away my crown,' (IV, i, 208). It is the desperate effort of a shorn individual to substantiate a structure of signification which loses all force when disjuncted from the political power it ratifies.

Richard's fallacy lies not in asserting his divine ordination but in believing it himself. It is actually the encoding of coercion in mystical terms - a tool aiding domination - perceived as such and mobilised to modulate the "false-consciousness" of the subjects, Richard, appropriating this "false-consciousness" for himself, become the dupe of his own propaganda. His inability to distinguish between his iconic and actual self, between "body politic" and "body natural", results in his failure to translate "policy" effectively into "praxis" - a failure not repeated by other Shakespearean kings.

III

Dominant ideology, in Shakespeare's England, was becoming increasingly aware of an ideology of religion and politics and of ideology itself as 'a system of illusory beliefs', operating to validate 'a particular social formation' (Dollimore 1984: 9), Hooker advocating 'A politic use of religion' for its hold over 'men's inward cogitations' identifies religion as a political device and testifies its efficacy in making people internalise and accept subordination thereby checking their impulse to interrogate authority (Quoted Dollimore: 12). Henry VIII's elaborate propaganda machinery indicates a growing recognition of "plebian" power and the greater effectiveness of appropriating and misdirecting it rather than direct suppression.

The demystifying tendency of contemporary emergent ideology, paradoxically, helped to consolidate this process. Machiavelli explodes the "providential myth" by unravelling the utilitarian link between religion, political coercion and legitimisation of power and simultaneously denotes the methods of using this subversion for enhancing dominant authority. The ruler must *learn* this contraption of "providence" to impose an erroneous belief on his subjects; he must *know* the reality for himself and *create* an illusion for mass consumption. Bolingbroke's carefully nurtured "popular" image marks the first step towards imprinting this "illusion" on public memory.

Scroop recounts the multitude supporting Bolingbroke's cause: 'White-beards', 'beadsmen', 'distaff-women' (*Richard II* III, ii, 112-20). Bolingbroke's popularity hinges on two factors, Non-disclosure of fore-plan shrouds his

motives. His "crusade" against Richard begins with the professed aim of reclaiming only what is rightfully his and imperceptibly expands to imbibe the totally alien notion of consecrated usurpation : 'In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne.' (IV.i.113). Adept at dissimulation, he deliberately misconstrues deposition as voluntary transfer : (Bolingbroke) : Are you contented to resign the crown ? (Richare) : Ay, (IV.i. 200-1).

Rolingbroke's public stance and private intentions, kept mutually exclusive, contribute to the maturing of his desires. In private he can pensively insinuate : "Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear ?" (V.iv.2), but when Exton presents the 'coffin' of his 'burried fear', he disassociates himself from the deed with pious and righteous indignation, obviously for public edification : 'I hate the murdered, love him murdered.' (V.vi.30-40).

The second implement for mass manipulation is his "cloak" of humility. Henry VI's famous advice to Hal (*1Henry IV* III.ii.29-91) documents the importance of his 'supple knee' and ostentatious courtesy. They have mustered 'Opinion, that did help ... [him] to the crown,' (III.ii.42). Henry's deconstruction of his public figure is a necessary iconoclasm, imperative for constating his power. Ironically, the image for public gaze is rebuilt from the very pieces of this demolished icon.

IV

Henry's successful mystification of his power-base acts on the principle of surprise. 'Seldom but sumptuous' - its remoteness makes it work (III.ii.58). But Henry's "public persona" is disadvantaged by its distinctive identity. Set up as an exemplar, it suffers constant public scrutiny. Isolation can be interpreted as indifference, and inaccessibility can tempt transgression. So while Henry simulates elevation, Hal affects "self-abnegation" by identifying himself with the populace. Hal destabilises and nullifies discontent by erasing from collective memory the idea of an antagonistic authority. His frivolity is a double-edged weapon. His notorious soliloquy (I.ii.188-210) discloses a much subtler variation of Henry's policy of surprise. While his father develops the theme of humble, unambitious royalty, he exploits the much more dramatic contrast between the dissolute rake and the brilliant administrator. Any monarch is a welcome alternative to the rake and this guarantees his success.

Infinitely more significant however, is his education and its purpose. To dictate terms to the "world upside down" he must first be cognisant of their reality and subsequently transform this "knowledge" into "power". As warwick rightly assures, Hal's rabble-rousing antics are mere exertations. The Prince 'but studies his companions' to 'gain the language'. In 'the perfectness of time' he will 'Cast off his followers' and use this "evil" experience to his advantage (*2Henry IV* IV.iv 68-78). The diminution of human beings to cheap, expendable instruction manuals is illuminating. "Casting-off", an euphemism for betrayal,

to be executed under the pretext of "time" and "necessity" - the two supratemporal props of authority - requires no further exoneration. Hal will then merely be 'Redeeming time' (*Henry IV* I.ii.210). From this viewpoint Hal's "learning" of Falstaff and his company is much more relevant than the rejection.

The "language metaphor" used in this context is crucial. Under the pretext of complicity, Hal studies and appropriates the mode of response available to the Eastcheap boys. At one point he proudly proclaims: 'I can drink with any tinker in his own language' (II.iv.15). And almost immediately he reduces this language to utter incoherence, robbing Francis the ostler, of the only tool with which, however indistinctly, he is capable of articulating himself. This usurpation and invalidating of their language leaves the populace bereft of a vital and primary mode of response. Moreover, language being the vehicle of thought, its absence reduces them to total impotence. Imprinting a "false-consciousness" on this *tabula-rasa* is not difficult. Henry IV concentrated on perfecting the icon: Hal makes absolutely malleable the ground on which it is to be erected. He has, furthermore, constructed an icon that seems to manifest the "dream vision" of the people.

V

"Warlike Harry" incites such a frenzy of nationalism that 'all the youth of England are on fire' (*Henry V* II.pro.1). So competently is the face fitted behind the mask, absolutism behind popular monarchy, that critics tend to decontextualise the emblems. Danby labels Hal the 'machivell of goodness' (Danby 1961: 100,199); Sir Lawrence Olivier dedicates his 1944 film version of *Henry V* to the commandoes and airborne troops of Britain.

But the text counterposes vivid visuals of blood and violence to Henry V's iconising strategies. Leashed like 'hounds' behind him, run 'famine, sword, and fire' (*Henry V* I.pro.7). This "mirror of all Christian kings" urges 'hot and forcing violation' of Harfleur's 'shrill-shrieking daughters' and is willing to play Herod to his 'bloody-hunting slaughtermen' (III.iii. 19-41).

Henry's chauvinistic delineation of war is devastatingly interrogated by three common soldiers - Bates, Court and Willams - before the battle of Agincourt (IV.i.). To Henry's jingoistic rhetoric they juxtapose the repugnance of war, the total absence of choice in their involvement, thus demonstrating the stark disparity between the imposer and those imposed upon. Henry's nocturnal visit is an extension of Hal's policy - he attempts to apprehend, harness and misdirect subversive discontent for self-aggrandisement. Before parting, he successfully distorts their vision, making them "see" as he does, but the audience witness the demystification of authority, power and ideology.

Henry V does not investigate the strategy which renders opaque the king's sectional interests. It registers instead, the resulting success and

simultaneously decodes it by referring it to its context - 'the how, why, by whom, and of what substance' it is constituted (Siemon 1985 : 101).

VI

Henry VIII, excluded from the canon of history plays for its carnivalesque bias, deals nevertheless with an almost contemporary English king of Shakespeare's time. The use of the masque, instead of the usual chronicle form to frame the subject, engenders speculation. Both the matter and the time (of authorship) merited careful handling. Unlike the previous protagonists - projected, or even recast by the author as manifest symbols of absolutism - Henry VIII is its political ideologue and the disseminator of its religious support-system, the Anglican Church. It is his legacy that Elizabeth and James perpetuate. Demystification of this model figure's manipulative intent was liable to be construed as subversive intrusion.

Alterations in the contemporary politico-social scenario was precipitating a crisis between the city and the court. Both initiated a regime of stringent censorship over their disputed jurisdiction. A major bone of contention was the control over theatres whose "lax morality" irked the Puritans less than their political import. Though geographically within city limits, traditional aristocratic patronage and James I's active encouragement frequently inclined the theatres towards absolutist propaganda.

The intransigent mood of both sections demanded drastic toning down of the examination of discontinuity and contradictions within myth-making. It was imperative to construct a regal facade beyond which even the author dare not probe. James I's hagiographical propaganda : Kings ... not only ... sit upon GODS throne, but even by GOD himself they are called GODS' (McIlwain ed. 1918 : 307), is echoed in the 'oracle' that 'heaven ... bids' Cranmer to deliver on Elizabeth and James (*Henry VIII* V.v. 14-62).

Henry's political prerogative is authorised not by military prowess or popular acceptance, but by providence sanctioned genealogy which is ratified by the text itself. He is the "unmoved mover" allocating all action. At Wolsey's banquet, once identified, he inevitably annexes the role of the king of misrule thereby validating decadent revelry, for he is the sole legitimiser of all forms of power - licit and illicit (I.iv.) Inexorable and inviolate manifestation of state authority and power, he can even annul royal marriage to vest primogenitureship on his heir.

Presented only in his official capacity, even during revelry (unlike Henry V he cannot be disguised), Henry VIII is *destiny* itself. Shakespeare deliberately renders inscrutable the king's private self to imprint the public persona as the only reality on audience memory. His rare onstage presence, very like a protagonist in absentia, is symptomatic of the text's fear of enquiry into its mystifying mechanism. The partial sympathy generated for Katherine's fall

and the old lady's accurate analysis of the lure of power for Anne Bullen's benefit (II.iii.), record the only instances of dissonance in the play. But marginalisation of such instances also denote the prepotence of absolutism.

Shakespeare's history plays, in the ultimate analysis, deconstruct the modes of stimulating public approval for a particular social formation. Ricahard II docketts the formulation of the myth. Henriad allocates a tension bntween the narrative impulse and its overall effect. The iconic intent of absolutist strategy is concurrently destabilised by exposing its manipulation of public consciousness. Henry VIII endorses monarchical power as an irrevocable order - an impersonal, supratemporal mechanism. But even here, where the deification process is carefully obscured, the objective ambience of the text makes it a reluctant encomium to Tudor myth.

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HUXLEY'S UNIVERSE IN *POINT COUNTERPOINT*

Narain Prasad Shukla :

In 1924, Aldous Huxley wrote to his friend Robert Nicholas about his just completed novel, *Those Barren Leaves* :

The main theme of it is the undercutting of everything by a sort of despairing scepticism and then the undercutting of that by mysticism.¹

In *Those Barren Leaves*, Huxley attacked materialism which had supported British fiction throughout the nineteenth century and had provided ground for the realism of Gissing as well as the irony of Austen or the comedy of Dickens. Huxley found nothing which was of substance. There was nothing beyond the human mind that called for unification. Mysticism presented in the novel, as a version of idealist metaphysics, expressed no more than the mind's fertile wish for order.²

In his study of the novels Peter Bowering has remarked that Huxley was a traditional moralist throughout his career envisioning the horror of what man has wrought.³ With *Those Barren Leaves* Huxley attempted to denounce twentieth-century Physics for shattering all that was beautiful in life. According to Bowering, it was not Huxley who undermined sensible order of things, but a progressive intellectual materialism which, throughout the nineteenth century, had annexed more and more areas of life, clinging to explicate them through logic and the laws of matter. In consequence, writers like Huxley found that love and beauty, intimation of innate value and mystical experience had been edged out of the scheme of things. By the end of the century there was simply no room left for spiritual ideas. Their place was usurped by the materialistic attitude to life :

Everywhere in Huxley we find science as destroyer of value : Darwin, Freud, Pavlov, conspire in turn to present a world-view in which man is deprived of his birth right as a free thinking, free acting individual.⁴

In *Point Counterpoint*, science works against a unified vision of reality no more than any other systematic mode. Huxley presents all theoretical perspectives, moral and aesthetic, chemical or psychological, as partial and inherently non-conjunctive. When Calamy looks at his hand, he does not see merely a lump of matter devoid of moral connotations. On the contrary, his vision frightens him precisely because he cannot limit it. He can see an unending series of possible "hands", moral, mental, physiologic, sensible : "universe lies on the top of the universe, layer after layer, distinct and separate". The hand has been split apart by an act of human scrutiny, and once fragmented——though they run through

every mode of theoretical integration — neither his character nor his author can reassemble it. What Huxley does is to continue the work of destruction he had begun in *Those Barren Leaves*, the "undercutting of everything" about which he had written to Robert Nicholas. He uses the conclusions of modern science as he uses other intellectual tools to present a vision of reality as he saw it.

Nineteenth century British fiction had claimed that whether composed ultimately of spirit or intellect, ideation or matter, real nature of universe could be grasped. In *Point Counterpoint*, Huxley denies that universe has a final form, instead he suggests a nature so fluid and so complex that it cannot be fully comprehended. Phillip Quarles comes to this conclusion while discussing his projected novel with his wife. He tells that he wishes to write in a new way, to give multiple versions of a single event, "However, queer the picture is," he says, "it can never be half as odd as the original reality".

"We take it all for granted, but the moment you start thinking, it becomes queer. And the moment you think the queerer it grows. That's what I want to get in this book — — the astonishingness of the most obvious things." ⁵

Since universe operates through processes which are difficult to understand a novelist who intends to tell the truth must abandon the nineteenth-century notions that one explanation is more valid than another. Hence Quarles' suggestion for a new type of novel, a novel which will skin off the predictable, orderly surface of events, counted on by materialists and moralists alike, and will open to view the ceaselessly flowing processes that are life itself. "Every object and event," Quarles claims in his notebook, "contains within itself an infinity of depths. Nothing is in the least like what it seems - or rather it's like several million other things at the same time". ⁶ Quarles would have the novelist sound as many of these "depths within depths" as he can. Instead of accounting for the event, he should compile account; instead of suggesting a meaning, he should multiply meaning. The cumulative method will force the artist to reproduce life while restraining his traditional habit of posturing in front of it. Quarles admits that the final product, an unintegrated compilation, will seem odd, but however, queer the picture is, it can never be half so odd as the original reality."

Huxley analyses a single moment in the life of his characters in order to produce a cross-section that reveals the variety of "depths within depths" inherent in any portion of reality. *Point Counterpoint* contains frequent instances of vast digression in which surface movement ceases entirely and perspective, withdrawn from characters, extends dimensionally in space and time. Only four pages into the novel, Huxley uses Marjorie Carling's pregnancy an occasion for the first of these complex and expansive visions

"She looked ugly, tired and ill. Six months from now her baby would be born. Something that had been a single cell, a cluster of cells, a little sac of tissue, a kind of worm, a potential fish with gills, stirred in her womb and would one day become a man — —. A thing would grow into a person, a tiny astonishing process of creation was going on within her, but Marjorie was conscious only of sickness and lassitude, the mystery for her meant nothing but fatigue and ugliness and a chronic anxiety about the future."⁷

Within the passage there are two acknowledged awarenesses, Marjorie's and her author's. Marjorie's understanding is limited : pregnancy has brought her discomfort and "a chronic anxiety about the future." But beneath her level of awareness lies a multitude of unrecognized meanings. By interrupting the flow of time, by freezing this particular instant in Marjorie's life, Huxley attempts to uncover the latent orders of significance and to juxtapose them against his character's perceptions. Huxley presents each systematic view of "the astounding process of creation" as true in the sense that every system can be detected at work within the given reality. As John Atkins had noted, Huxley's insistence on producing collated descriptions of this sort sets him against the main stream of British fiction.

It is important to separate Huxley's vision of universe from the conclusions of author's apparently no less pessimistic view about man's ability to deal successfully with his world. Among the Victorians Hardy and Conrad, for example, both saw dark and destructive powers latent in the creative activity of the universe. They assumed that men are locked in struggle with an environment that is, at best, indifferent to human values and achievement. In their novels, while man proposes, the universe disposes. The problem they state is one of scale : reality operates beyond the range of human control, without regard to man's moral yardsticks, good and evil. Measuring the measureless, man is counter-natural creature who opposes an overwhelming and insentient universe with his ideals.

In declaring war between man and universe, Hardy and Conrad differed from more optimistic colleagues, but they did not contradict the belief that reality can be made intelligible. Although they insisted that the universe will not acknowledge man's judgements which are final and accurate. A man might learn too late about the darker impulses of universe, or be unable to deflect disaster from himself, but he can see clearly how things had come to be as they were. He could follow an obvious sequence of cause and effect, even if understanding brought him no salvation.

Huxley's contemporaries T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats all agreed that chaotic discontinuity was the present condition of mankind. However, unlike Huxley, Eliot, Joyce and Pound presented

discontinuity as a historical phenomenon, not as a revelation of unalterable truth. Modern man, they said, found reality incomprehensible because he had perversely disrupted the cultural systems which formerly oriented him within this universe. He had himself begun the terrible drift into disaster by cutting his civilization loose from its roots in tradition. While the dissolution he consequently experienced was real, it was not implicit in the nature of reality. Man's dislocated perspective was responsible for the chaos he saw surrounding him. Unlike his conservative contemporaries Huxley believed all comprehensive scheme of order had been hopelessly discredited. Not that traditional perspectives were wrong. On the contrary, it was the problem of reality. Huxley acknowledged that it accepted interpretation from any perspective. Every interpretation made some sense, therefore, no interpretation made complete sense. Huxley's reality was indefatigably accommodating. Ideologically, over-generous, it validated alike the view of Anglicans, atheists, fascists, vegetarians, nuclear physicists, Marxists and Yogis. Of course, in denying credibility to virtually no principle of order reality refuted the claims of the whole lot, revolutionary or traditional, humanists or scientific.

Huxley uses music to describe the baffling universe, his title *Point Counterpoint* refers not only to the patterned lives of his characters, but also to the unending flow of the contrapuntal processes which he saw in every object and event. Early in the novel, during a concert scene, he halts the action in order to intrude an explanatory digression on the nature of music :

"The great Pongilioni gluilly killed his flute. He blew across the mouth hole, and a cylindrical air column vibrated. Bach's meditations filled the Roman quadrangle ... You seem to have found the truth, clear definite and unmistakeable, it is announced by the violins; you have it, you triumphantly hold it. But it slips out of your grasp to present itself in a new aspect among the cellos, and yet again."⁸

Through a performance of Bach's Minor suite — — Huxley demonstrates how intensely dense he finds universe to be, and consequently, how futile he finds man's efforts to simplify or comprehend it.

Although Bowering might have us see in both passages the destruction of spiritual experience by scientific methodology, : Pongilioni's Bach becomes a vibrating "air column" as Marjorie's unborn child became a mere cluster of cells. Taken singly, any intelligible system, be it psycho - analysis or biology would provide an acceptable ordering of Marjorie's pregnancy and of Pongilioni's performance. Marjorie had no idea that biology or evolution might cut into the meaning of her experience. The astounding process of creation was going on within her, but Marjorie was conscious of only " sickness and lassitude"⁹. If science had robbed Marjorie's pregnancy of value, that would be a frightening but potentially remediable problem. Huxley's conclusion is in fact far more

bleak. Life itself has thrust upon Marjorie, as upon all mankind, processes so complex and painfully conflicted that no one can disentangle them. Marjorie recognises only her immediate feelings. She does not see that her life is patterned out among confused and contradictory systems. Her unawareness, however, does not suspend the weight of reality upon her.

In Huxley's scheme of things daily life demands selective perception : men must see the world partially in order to function. All conscious activity, the work of the sweeper as well as that of the artist, the scientist, or the physician depends upon his belief that certain processes are of value, while others are not. Without faith in central meanings, without the belief that individual experience clusters about a real centre of value, the necessary tasks of everyday life, as well as paintings, discovery and healing would cease. Most men could not function with Huxley's universe in full view. Indifferent to the human need for the hierarchical order, Huxley's universe remains imperturbably conflicted. Its contradiction due to no particular mode of human perception, but to its own nature, remains endlessly inchoate.

Through *Point Counterpoint* Huxley maintains his sense of an unalterably restless and contradictory universe in which despite human effort, shapelessness dominates form and process erodes reality. This conception is his achievement. It is extraordinary in English Literature or as John Atkins more moderately concludes "rare"¹⁰. Certainly, it is true that Huxley's nihilism extends the late Victorian pessimism of Conrad and Hardy. Likewise, his notion that men must see partially, that they are unable to see their many perceptions, does reiterate a common post-war theme. Nonetheless, Huxley clearly establishes a position radically beyond that of his predecessors and his contemporaries. In *Point Counterpoint*, the only "unity" reality offers is a universal repudiation of meaning. He declares that a confused flood of processes which he discovers within every apparently solid object is more important and more real than any previously held certainty.

Of course, Huxley did not finally prefer interminable conflict and paradoxical dead ends to simplicity and restoration. His career from the publication of *Eyeless in Gaza* onwards clearly indicates an intense longing for regenerative world view. Nonetheless, at the time he wrote *Point Counterpoint*, Huxley seems willingly and successfully to have subordinated his own conservative tendencies and to have applied cold rigorous logic to the phenomenon of disorder generally perceived in the life of twentieth-century man. When logic compelled him to envision a disturbing universe that favoured process rather than form and multiplicity rather than order he held by this vision and sought to change fiction in order to accommodate it. It is true that disorder was a commonly treated concern. But few were willing to scrutinize disorder as intensely as Huxley did and at such length until disorder revealed itself as ultimate vision.

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ROSIE AND JULIA : A CRITICAL STUDY

Pralhad A. Kulkarni,

Born in two different countries and having a different cultural heritage, R.K. Narayan (1906) and William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) have discussed in their novels the evil that runs through man which ultimately culminates in the tragedy of life. It seems that they both have treated their characters and especially Rosie (*The Guide*) and Julia (*Theatre*) from this point of view.

The Guide depicts the story of Rosie. She is an educated woman who wants to pursue her traditional heritage of dance. She comes in contact with Raju - the railway guide. She dislikes the passivity of her husband about her performance of dance. Her husband Marco is an archaeologist. But later knowing some immoral relationship between Rosie and Raju, Marco leaves her lonely and goes to Madras. Soon Rosie learns about the case of forgery against Raju and she, too, returns to Madras.

It seems that Rosie is the subject matter of the novel. She is born in 'a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers'.¹ People never consider them 'respectable and civilized'.² She is a lovely and elegant girl with 'a figure, a slight and slender one'.³ Her mother plans a new kind of life for her. She sends Rosie to school. Rosie then becomes an M.A. Then she reads the advertisement of Marco regarding marriage. She sends her photograph to Marco and to her great surprise he accepts her as a bride. Soon they get married. In order to study the caves, Marco along with his wife Rosie comes to the Mempi Hills where they both come in contact with Raju - the railway guide. Rosie's beauty attracts him and naturally he begins to feel for her. Marco's passive attitude towards her makes her take the help of Raju. She becomes more 'open' and free in the company of Raju. Marco always criticises her dancing as acrobatics. On the contrary Raju encourages her to pursue her love for art. Marco notices Rosie's disinterestedness in living with him and hence gives her permission to live in a hotel far away from the Mempi Hills. He is in that way free and allows her freedom. But soon he learns about the immoral and doubtful relations between Rosie and Raju, and decides to leave Rosie alone. He criticises her that : 'she is a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters'.⁴ After completing the study of caves, Marco returns to Madras lonely.

Bewildered Rosie returns to Raju for shelter. Raju's mother suggests him not to take the responsibility of such a woman. But Raju, full of lust, does not listen to her. Rosie lives with him under the same roof as if 'were married'⁵ woman. Taking the pseudo name Nalini, Rosie becomes a name in the field of dancing. Though it seems that the glimmering world of stage makes Rosie forget

her ties with her husband, sometimes she remembers him and feels that : 'After all he is my husband. I have to respect him'.⁶ And so when she reads the review of Marco's book published in the Weekly, she immediately remembers him.

Rosie is shocked to know that a case for forgery has been lodged against Raju. Ashamed of this, Rosie feels that she is insulted and, so, decides not to 'face the public again'.⁷ Slowly the cluster of Raju's lust around her begins to recede. She decides to 'stop dancing'. She is sure that Marco will accept her if she gives up dancing forever. She wants to go back to him. Raju expresses his doubts over her decision. She tells him that if Marco does not allow her then : 'the best solution for all concerned would be to be done with this business of living'.⁸ Even at the juncture of the case, Rosie helps him by every possible way and only then returns to Madras to her husband's house. She tries to fulfil the assurances and promises that she has given to Raju.

Somerset Maugham's *Theatre* describes the story of Julia, the artiste. Her aspiration for becoming a reputed actress ultimately ruins her. She comes in contact with Michael Gosselyn, Lord Charles Tamerley and Thomas Fennel and shows her selfishness in them. She often likes to keep company with youngmen only. She wants to remain in the lime light of the stage forever. But in fact she goes away from reality of life. Her son Roger reminds her of this and it makes her aware of the situation. She begins to feel herself guilty and begins to contemplate over the matters.

Maugham's Julia retraces her past through the album of her photographs. She tries to connect her present with the past. She remembers her childhood which she has spent with her mother's sister at St. Malo. At the age of twelve, she comes in contact with an old actress who gives her preliminary lessons in acting. At the age of sixteen, she goes to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and wins every prize that is open to her. When she actually begins acting, praise comes to her from both the people and the paper, Jimmie Langton 'a fat, bald-headed, rubicund man of forty five'¹⁰ who runs a repertory theatre at Middlespoos, observes her performance and appreciates her style. He tells her : 'you' ve got magnetism and you don't seem to have an idea 'how to use it'.¹¹ He promises her to make her the greatest actress in England. Julia fascinated by the stage, accepts the contract and joins the theatre.

A blooming actress in youth, Julia comes here in contact with Michael Gosselyn, the young beautiful actor in the theatre. At the very sight of Michael, Julia falls in love with him. They both begin to play the assigned roles in plays. She learns about the thrifty attitude of Michael, but still she appreciates him. She visits the Gosselyns and there Michael proposes to her. Later she marries him. When on the account of War Michael leaves her, she begins to feel that she is losing 'something that was infinitely precious to her'¹² in him. She is now thirty and pregnant too!

Another man who woos her is Lord Charles Tamerley. He spends a lot of on her parties and programmes. He loves her. But Julia treats him as 'friend, and adviser, her confident'¹³. She never accepts him as her lover. People use to say that Julia is a wife of Michael but mistress of Lord Charles Tamerley. She does not pay much attention to.

The whirlwing that sweeps the whole life of Julia, comes in the form of Thomas Fennel - Tom - in her life. He proves to be more tragic. Tom's youth attracts her and later Tom becomes an inseparable part of her life. She becomes reckless in his company and never bothers about what people say of her. Gossips spread about her relationship with Tom. But Michael says : 'sex does not mean a thing to her ...'¹⁴ and further adds that if one wants to be great, then one has to give one's 'whole self to it'.¹⁵

Now waning beauty of Julia never becomes an attraction for Tom. He is under the obligations of her and hence keeps silence. But Julia learns that Tom is losing interest in her. Tom begins to love Avice Crichton, an actress of his own age. Julia feels that her abode of love, peace and joy is taken away by Avice Crichton.

Another blow she receives is from her own son Roger. Since his childhood he lives away from his parents. He plainly tells her that he likes her but does not love her. He tells her that her whole life has become vehicle for sentiments of others. He tells her that she always lives in the world of 'Make believe' which is faraway from reality. Julia begins to sense a vague feeling of guilt and becomes contemplative. She thinks that she has wronged both her husband and her admirer Charles Tamerley. She thinks herself as : 'I'm a beast, I'm a slut, I'm just a bloody bitch'.¹⁶ An awareness of guilt tenfolds her in loneliness and only contemplation remains with her to pest her.

Comparing Rosie and Julia, it seems that Julia is more egocentric. The 'Make-Believe' world becomes only reality to her, which in fact turns out to be a prison she herself has created around her. She does not feel any difference in offering herself to others. She is a stage-maniac woman. Her progression singles out her from others. Her self-awareness exposes the evil of egotism in her.

Rosie is not an egoistic. But she is easily swayed by any flattery and that is her weakness. She thinks only of her art and she is ready to sacrifice everything for this. From a mere educated woman she becomes a myth on the stage. She is like a tide that rises, reaches at the climax and then recedes again to the centre. R K Narayan's characters mostly belong to the middle-class and naturally they carry with them the middle-class morality. But in case of Rosie it seems that she does not have any morality as she belongs to the lower strata of society. R K Narayan expresses a typical Indianness in her character. And, hence, at the end of the episode, Rosie decides to return to her husband. Rosie represents R K Narayan's views on art and its place in life. Perhaps Narayan intends to show that nothing is more important than an orderly life. So he ultimately makes Rosie

return to her house.

Julia is fascinated by the Make-Believe world; which at last destroys her. She has grown indifferent to the emotional aspect of life of others. Julia's unequivocal, unparalleled and unchallenged career takes her away from reality. Maugham portrays in her a relentless pursuer of art. She is everything - a lover, a friend, a mother, a wife and moreover an artiste. And precisely this role of an artiste dominates her whole life. Maugham, it seems that, is suggesting here that art and life should go hand-in-hand, because the base of art is life itself. But Julia commits the mistake of neglecting this and hence faces the tragedy in her life.

Both Rosie and Julia begin their journey from innocence to knowledge of self-understanding which drives them to reality. Rosie, after knowing the price she had paid for her art, decides to return to her husband; while Julia, knowing the end of her love in Tom, becomes contemplative.

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TENSION IN "OZYMANDIAS"

Krishna Banerjee

This is an attempt to apply "tension", a cardinal principle of New Criticism, to Shelley's sonnet, "Ozymandias", which follows Allen Tate's definition of good poetry.

Now, Tate's special use of the term "Tension" needs some clarification. According to Tate a good poem reveals tension between the denotation (extension) and connotation (intension) of words that weave its texture. Such a notion of poetry has caused raising of eyebrows. The commonest objection to it is : instead of relieving tension (that is to say, effecting a catharsis or a Ricardian harmonization of impulses) should poetry impose more tension on the reader? Is not tension one of the hazards of modern civilization ? Do we need more of it ? and that, too, from the poet ?

"Tension", as it figures in Tate's terminology, is a near-synonym for "pervasion". It is evident from Tate's own confession about the coinage. "I am using the term", he writes, not as a general metaphor, but as a special one, derived from lopping the prefixes off the logical terms extension and intension.¹ In logic extension is the denotation of a term which pervades a whole class; intension, on the other hand, is the connotative meaning of a term which includes all its individual attributes. The one is surface-pervasion and the other, depth-pervasion. Talking of this pervasive coherence and compatibility of the two levels of meaning, Tate adds, "The remotest figurative significance that we can derive does not invalidate the extensions of the literal statement."²

But if we understand by tension the stretching of an elastic object from end to end - its usual meaning - even then it need not worry those of us who expect poetry to exude a soothing effect and help to relax. For tension as such (if the analogy is from the physical science) is a principle of stability and balance between two contrary lines of motion.³ And if there is a disbalancing resistance or pull from either line there is a problem of overtension or undertension (We may also recall that normal tension in the physiological system, as distinguished from hypertension and hypotension, is a sign of health and well being). Just as a moving body has to balance itself against fall between the linear thrust of motion and the gravitational pull, similarly a poem makes progression by constantly stabilizing itself between the two pulls of extension and intension - like a snake that alternately contracts and relaxes its body in motion. This stabilizing and mobilizing principle is called "Tension" by Tate.

A degree of tension is required by a body to be in a functioning order. The strings of a musical instrument are tuned so as to produce a tautness in them. The language of poetry sounds extremely high strung if it is overladen with connotations. On the other hand, it sounds flat and lax if the denotative side is over emphasized.⁴

To the romantic the denotative meaning related to generalized facticity is too true to be good; eager to explore new dimensions of truth as experience — individualistic and often eccentric — he employs a language that is heavily symbolic and intensive. This is how Tate and other New Critics talk in general about the romantic idiom and the romantic disregard for denotation.

Published in 1818, four years before the poet's death, "Ozymandias" is an important piece of Shelley's later poetry which reveals an adequate tension of the poetic idiom. For one thing, there is no overt symbolism in the poem. The structure is imagistically informed to the full and its denotative level does not suffer any blurring out or interruption in the interest of its rich texture of connotations.

The thematic structure is simple and straightforward : the poet meets a traveller who talks of the ruins of a colossal statue he came across in a desert. From the inscription on the pedestal the traveller has gathered that the statue is of the king Ozymandias, who, as the inscription goes, proclaimed himself as "king of kings" (L.10). The statue as the traveller finds it has been reduced to a pair of legs, but its "shattered visage" (L.4), lying nearby — a fine piece of art — still expresses the king's contempt and pride.

The whole poem is a compact image, constructed gradually by shifting, narrowing and widening of focus. Thus intension and extension acquire almost a physical dimension in that the intensive focus on the pair of legs gradually extends to cover the vast panorama of the desert. Neither the poet nor the traveller offers any open moralizing, and there is not a single abstract idea introduced to philosophize upon the image.

In the colloquial opening line, "I met a traveller from an antique land", the significance of "antique" passes unnoticed because of its unassuming setting. Without affecting the meter, "ancient" could have been substituted for "antique". But the poet evidently had a feel for the right word, for "antique" suggests a greater remoteness, a still, cold, ossified, museum like remoteness, not to be found in "ancient". Being rich in connotations this word, however, does not break away from its denotation; it is perfectly merged in the context.

The casual opening of the poem has a lack of pomposity which helps in sustaining artistic detachment and deepens the ironic level of meaning. The first sentence uttered by the traveller, "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone/stand in the desert" (L1.2-3), projects the central image, and is strongly evocative of curiosity. The numerous's and t's add to the bareness and solidity of the image. The symbolic significance intension of "vast and trunkless", suggesting the paradox of impaired grandeur, ambition rendered meaningless, does not strike one at the first reading due to the adequacy and sufficiency of the denotative meaning : in other words, it is not necessary within the the given context to read any symbolic meaning into the phrase "vast and trunkless", and yet its apparant

meaning does not come in the way of exploring deeper connotations. It is just an instance to show how the entire sonnet is extremely tidy (no loose ends of intension) as well as ironic (no shallowness of extension).

The stone legs, a travesty of human pride, are the ridiculous remnant of the king who once deemed himself eternally powerful. The dots after the sentence, suggesting a pause in the narration, are also functional. Focussing the lens of his imagination on this pair of legs in a sort of close-up, the poet waits for a while to allow a free play to the reader's imagination, before describing the panoramic view of the desert. Then, widening the range of view a little, the poet goes on to describe another piece of stone lying near the legs. It is the face of the statue, shattered and half sunk in the sand. This visage-image is projected with a sense of relevance and precision. The poet does not mention any other part of the broken statue and concentrates not even on the head in its entirety, but, precisely, on the "visage" because that is what bears the hieroglyph of doomed pride. This elimination, though intentional, is not unjustified, this is to say, it does not put the denotation of the image under strain. It is imaginable that due to one or several earthquakes and with the passage of time the other broken parts of the statue have been completely buried in the desert sand, and even the head is half buried with the face up.

In the image of the 'shattered visage' there is a paradoxical interplay of two opposite ideas : permanence and impermanence. And here we find tension in its other meaning of dramatic conflict. The stone face has clear marks of decay and destruction in so far as the material base is concerned, but the emotions engraved in the stone face have outlined, for an amazing length of time, both the sculptor and his model. (Ll.7-8). They have outlived even the statue in a certain way - the breaking down of the statue has not been able to efface those fine lines and curves in the frowning face which so vividly depict pride, hatred and domineering egotism. The poet gives credit to the sculptor for penetrating the king's mind and carving out his emotions in lifeless stone, so that these slabs of stone have not only become lifelike but have also survived the model and the artist. Art has triumphed over life - this is the apparent significance. But underneath this upper layer of meaning - the extension - there is another hidden implication - the intension. The poet suggests the impermanence of individual lives *vis-a-vis* the permanence of human nature as such. Rulers, despots, tyrants have their rise and fall, but the same emotions, the same gestures and frowns once manifested in them appear again and again in different persons at different intervals of time. It is worth noticing that the poet, through the *dramatis personae* of the traveller, contemplates the frown and sneer of the face with the aloofness of a bystander, with the detachment of an art connoisseur, which we normally do not associate with his poetry. Shelley withholds moral verdict while furnishing us with the objective correlative, the situation, the image which would automatically evoke the intended response in the reader.

There is a witty synecdoche in the antithetically structured line, "The hand

that mocked them and the heart that fed" (L.8). The hand and the heart respectively symbolize the sculptor and the king. There is a happy alliteration in the antithetical pair, 'hand' and 'heart', and a great deal of suggestivity is concentrated in the word 'mocked': The sculptor produced an imitation of the king's emotions by carving them in stone, but by doing so, he has ridiculed them. The statue is in fact a caricature, although the sculptor may have produced it to satisfy the vanity of the king or his successors. This sense of mockery is carried down the lines by implication. Not only did the unknown sculptor mock the king's vanity, the statue has been subjected to a worse mockery at the hand of time, that has levelled the arrogance of Ozymandias to the bare plane of the desert.

There is a very cunning ambiguity also in the phrase "the heart that fed". The heart of the king Ozymandias once nurtured the passions which have been mimicked by the sculptor. But 'the heart that fed' may also imply that the king's heart, while feeding those dark passions was itself consumed, so that the king suffered a loss of all his human sentiments and was rendered heartless. The poet was perhaps unaware of the possibility of such a twist in the meaning, but it shows how Shelley's poetic idiom had sufficiently matured to acquire tension through ironic ambiguities.

The irony of the poem reaches its point of culmination in the words on the pedestal :

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings,
Look on my work, ye Mighty, and despair :"

(Ll.10-11)

The words are puffed up with vanity, but the puffed balloon is pricked as soon as we realize the total change of significance which the second line has undergone. Evidently the king had several other monumental structures built round his own gigantic statue, and had instructed his subjects to engrave these challenging words on the pedestal to evoke awe, fear and the despair of jealousy in the hearts of other mighty kings. The present state of the statue also strikes the mighty with despair for a completely different reason: it is really disheartening to see how the ravaging power of time has wiped out all the works left on earth by the mighty Ozymandias and has made a travesty of his own statue. The couplet thus sounds a note of warning to all who aspire for a perpetuation of their memory by falsely imposing on themselves an overbearing greatness.

As the tension is finally built up, the pomp of the preceding lines is beautifully counter balanced by the short, anti climactic sentence that follows : "Nothing beside remains." Hereupon the focus suddenly expands to take a panoramic view of the vast expanses of the desert :

"Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sand stretch far away."

(Ll.12-14).

The paradox of "colossal wreck" sums up the ironic significance of the entire poem. The two epithets, "lone" and "level" not only apply to the desert sand, but also suggest the paradoxical aloneness and lowliness of the imposing statue, the trunk of which is levelled to the ground, with its proud head stuck deep in sand. The king's statue is deserted to erode and be reduced to sand. The poem ends upon this tension between the self-aggrandizing gesture of Ozymandias and the deep and pervasive indifference of the lonely desert.

In these last lines, the voice is hushed. The alliterative b's, l's, and s's and the long diphthong in "away" suggest distancing and gliding of the focus farther and farther towards the horizontal line.

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1. "Tension in Poetry", *Reason in Madness*, (Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, New York, 1968), p.72.
 2. *Ibid*, p.72.
 3. "The idea of energy, and its relationship to force and movement, was also formulated by early Greek thinkers, and was developed by Stoic philosophers. They postulated the existence of a sort of life-giving tension (*tonos*), which supports and moves all things;" M.L. Von Franz "Science and the Unconscious", *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G Jung (Dell Publishing Co. INC, New York, 1968), p.380
 4. In Tate's writings, however, "tension" is very often construed as "conflict".

CHILDHOOD : A THEME IN ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S POETRY

Tapati Lahiri

In England the theme of childhood has become so engagingly interesting for a long time that some of the most famous writers have felt it equally natural to express themselves not only in prose but in poetry also. Among them are William Blake, William Wordsworth, Charles Dickens and George Eliot and also R.L. Stevenson. My aim is to study Stevenson's poetry on childhood, with particular reference to the religio-philosophical aspects, conceived in a poetical vein. It is, however, not irrelevant at first to throw light on Victorian attitudes towards children.

The Victorian treatment of the theme of childhood is undoubtedly specific. Coming to this age we see a galaxy of writers who were guided by prevailing social attitudes towards children. The medium for expressing the feelings and sentiments relating to the child was essentially the novel. What the Romantics attempted to bring into light through poetry was done by the Victorian novelists through prose. Being a social reformer, Dickens took up the problems of the child particularly the child's helpless miserable condition. The social injustice, extreme poverty, unhealthy condition in orphanages and child-labour - these were among the topics on which Dickens concentrated his attention.

Belonging to the same period Stevenson, however, displayed a fresh outlook as he created in his poems the typical world of children, their imaginations, feelings and dreams, the world totally cut off from that of heinous ugliness and oppression. With his 'Child's Garden of Verses', a small volume intended for children, we enter into a different world in which we mark a strong sense of emotional sincerity in the poet's interest in children.

The paramount importance of Stevenson's poetry on childhood lies in the fact that he catches all the simplicity of childhood in his poetry, the simplicity related, to some extent, to a religious concept of childhood. Again, another importance of the poet is found that he is neither yet a seeker for a vision of childhood in a mystical sense nor does he point to any divine unseen power. He projects in a simple and spontaneous manner the image of the child at play, expressing the ineffable almost regal happiness in the heart of the child. "Good and Bad Children" is a poem of this kind. The poet says :

Happy hearts and happy faces
Happy play in grassy places
That was how in ancient ages,
Children grew to kings and sages.¹

The lines constituted the fundamental Christian view on childhood. The view has all along been at the back of the poet's mind whenever he has treated the child-aspect in his poems. The poet stresses in the above lines the child's

heart, face and play. In all these three, heart, face and play, exists the child's innocent gesture. Its happiness lies in its contentment with simple diet :

You must still be bright and quiet,
And content with simple diet;
And remain through all be wild 'ring,
Innocent and honest children.²

To Stevenson childhood is as beautiful as flowers in the garden. Man is beautiful in his childhood just as Nature is with the vernal flowers.

Stevenson suggests the image of Heaven. But the image does not carry any utopian connotation. The concept is expressed in Stevenson's favourite poetic theme that whoever retains childlike behaviour and habits, is surely blessed with a happy and joyous life. According to him, Heaven is not afar but is where children create another Eden with their innocent gestures, quips and jokes. They look at the world of their elders with wonder or amusement and their responses are instructive. Such boyish talk is heard in "Auntie's Skirts":

Whenever Auntie moves around,
Her dresses make a curious sound,
They trail behind her up the floor
And trundle after through the door.³

Through this world of natural freshness of the children Stevenson creates the Edenic atmosphere in his children's verse. The typical world of children, their feelings, dreams and imagination are the elements that go to configure this world. For example, in 'Looking Forward' the child says.

When I am grown to man's estate
I shall be very proud and great,
And tell the other girls and boys
Not to meddle with my toys.⁴

To the poet, childhood is not meant only for a vision, but is the happiest of times in human life. To enjoy such god-given happiness Stevenson loved all children and through his juvenalia made us love the children. In this regard, Janet Adam Smith's observation on Stevenson's verse is important :

We enjoy Stevenson's poetry when we are young and full of emotion about situations that we have not yet experienced in real life.⁵

Like an artist, Stevenson always tried to catch the happiest moment even in the humdrum activities and follies of children. Poets are artists in the sense that they can identify, be absorbed in and also fully articulate the beauty in all things, even though the process be only momentary. Poets, not excepting Stevenson, often feel that beauty is fleeting, but even in the fleetingness they catch the whispers of immortality. 'The Little Land', for example, is a poem of

this type. The poem affords us the innocent pleasure of the little child at the expense of the activities of the elders-activities that are apparently big and pompous but convey mere fun to the child :

When my eyes I once again
Open, and see all things plain :
High bare walls, great bare floor;
Great big knobs on drawn and door;
Great big people perched on chairs,
Stitching tucks and mending tears,
Each a hill that I could climb,
And talking nonsense all the time.⁶

The idea "talking nonsense all the time" may be in reality silly to elders but children through their spontaneous instinctive vision catch the reality of the situation with almost Swiftian accuracy. If we try to see through the eyes of little children we can enjoy the charm of a thing. As a matter of fact, children's eyes are always open, not bandaged by wordly colour while ours are 'like a sealed dove.'

The philosophy of life (if we may call it a philosophy as such) a child unconsciously and instinctively develops was deeply realised by the poet. For instance, "to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive",⁷ is a mild tune of juvenile philosophy of life and can hardly be questioned. It carries in it the fruits of perception which can be tested only by one who lives in the Infinite and Eternal. 'The Little Land' is a long poem in which the child is longing for "sailing through the skies" - and for

"sailing far away
To the pleasant Land of play,"⁸

but just before reaching the imaginary land he would

just come back, a sleepy head
Late at night to go to bed....⁹

In order to keep him alive more pleasantly in hopes and dream that to achieve the goal. Elderly persons, on the other hand, as Stevenson points out in his essay 'Child's Play', have no such feelings. In another essay, Stevenson says about the grown ups: "All the time they had their eye on the model."¹⁰ No covetous longing for prizes or attainment of any goal makes the child sick, pale and disgusted. In the way of fulfilling a wish the child reaps no profit for future and hence the pursuit always retains its enthralling quality.

Profits or attachment to the material gains cause grief to elderly persons. They are always on a breathless run, hoping against hope, till the last day of life. Stevenson says in his poem,

To Will H. Law :

In wet wood and miry lane,
Still we pant and proud in vain;
Still with leaden foot we chase
Waning pinion, fainting face:
Still with gray hair we stumble on,
Till, behold, the vision gone!
Where hath fleeting beauty led ?
To the doorway of the dead.¹¹

In trying to achieve what is not within easy reach the grown-up man completely exhausts himself. Stevenson's child, on the other hand, does not fall a prey to the snare of worldly desires. The poet shows the child's pure nature in *Marching Song* :

Bring the comb and play upon it!
Marching, here we come!
Whillie cocks his highland bonnet,
Johnnie beats the drum.¹²

His child invites us to participate in his cheerful game which holds out no sickening hope of monetary gains. Even in a child's thought and image there lies no trace of his greediness—

The world is so full of a number of things,
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings.¹³

In the imagination of being happy as kings the child expresses no greedy desires. What Stevenson says is significant. The child has no cares for worldly gains or anything else.

Playing for play's sake wholly in his life. He plays for the sake of innocent pleasure. In *The Unseen Playmates* children are shown joyous with their friends :

He lies in the laurels, he runs on the grass.
He sings when you tinkle the musical glass;
When e'er you are happily and cannot tell why
The Friend of the children is sure to be by!¹⁴

This is how the poet succeeds in exploring the child's nature. Another, *The Hayloft*, shows the child's joy while playing by the pleasant meadow :

O what a joy to chamber, there,
O what a place for play,
With the sweet, the dim, the dusty air,
The happy hills of hay.¹⁵

In Stevenson's poem the importance of games is highly stressed and he deliberately attempts at giving an idea of the typical child-attitude; "as a critic for the very nature of a child is to *play*."¹⁶

This concept of childhood in Stevenson's poetry has a basic affinity with the same of Rabindranath Tagore, who has written amply on the theme of childhood. Both Stevenson and Tagore believed that the child played the role of supreme power in creation as far as the child's game was concerned. In the little volume *A Child's Garden of Verses* Stevenson captures almost completely the joy inherent in the imaginative power of children. In *My Shadow* Stevenson shows how the child plays by his shadow :

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jumps before me, when I jump into my bed.¹⁷

This is indeed a child's typical play. Tagore's treatment of the child-theme in this respect is much more far-reaching than that of Stevenson. In a number of little poems Tagore creates the image of the child in Bholanath (Shiva) who is not solely "the great destroying and dissolving power",¹⁸ as usually thought, but also the Supreme God who finds *anandam* (ecstasy) both in destroying and creating the world. For example, Tagore invites :

O My child, my infant Shiva,
self-forgetful,
at every steps of thy wild dance
things totter and tumble,
thy gatherings are scattered,
and a whirlwing of destruction
spreads the dust of thy trampled
toys in the sky.¹⁹

Tagore took this idea in terms of the games of a child. In the poem *On the Seashore*.²⁰ Tagore shows the child's absorption in his own world, either making it or breaking it, without concern for what others doing. The context of Tagore is helpful. For Stevenson, too, asserts that there is a supra-human element in the child's life, which distinguishes a child from elders. This is another way of saying that life God "expresses the spontaneous, pure play of the divine" in ²¹ the form of a child.

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